THE PROCESSIONALS

ELINOR MORDAUNT

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THE PROCESSIONALS

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Etc.

The Processionals

BY

ELINOR MORDAUNT

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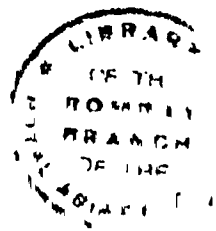

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THE PROCESSIONALS

CHAPTER I

It was the second week after Christmas, and it seemed to Hugh D'Eath, driving through the country town, with its sprawling suburbs, too large for any individuality, too small for mystery, that the whole place—the shops with their unwanted Christmas gifts, their display of useless rubbish, strings of coloured paper, lanterns, flags—wore a jaded look, as did the people, their hands deep in pockets or muffs, bent half double before the icy wind which swept scraps of straw and paper along with it. Merriment had been an effort; and now, once the festive season was well past, the inhabitants of Cottingham gave it up, relapsing into that state of liver and languor common to such places. Only from out the windows of the club, with lamps already lighted though it was but just three o'clock, there streamed a warm glow. Hugh D'Eath knew exactly what was going on there; some of the men were nodding after their lunch, some playing bridge; some reiterating—as they always did reiterate—their opinion that England was going to the dogs, or worrying the already ragged question of Home Rule.

He remembered when he was a boy of nineteen driving down to this very club to fetch his father home, the day after Beaconsfield died—the very day before his parents went abroad, on that trip which ended so fatally; and how his father had met an acquaintance, stood on the steps with him discussing Home Rule and the machinations of the Government, exactly as they still discussed it whenever Hugh D'Eath, a man of fifty-two by now, happened to find himself obliged, waiting for his daughters or a train, to put

in half an hour or so at the place, hoary with Toryism, a trifle bloated with a surfeit of gossip.

It was cold in the town. But as the horses began to breast the five long miles which wound steadily uphill to Dene Royal the wind cut like a knife. D'Eath shuddered to think what it must have been like for Barnett on the box, full in the teeth of it. It did not matter about the footman, he was young and full-blooded; but between Barnett and his master there was that odd sort of likeness which one sometimes sees in old family servants. For Barnett, also, was thin and austerely wistful; might just as well have been an actor or a bishop as a coachman.

As to D'Eath himself, surely there was never any man less like a country squire. And yet he had never been anything else, had come into possession even before he was of age.

For all that, his appearance, his expression told the truth. Barnett's air of intellectual refinement was skin deep; in reality he was all coachman; there was no one for miles round who knew more about horses, their management and doctoring. The vet's bitter animosity bore witness to this. But his master's whole personality, his expression, his rather tentative way of moving, the dreaminess of his blue eyes, the delicacy of his finely cut features, expressed him exactly as he was: with too much humour for an actor, too much mysticism for a bishop; and yet with something at once devotional and histrionic in his nature. Never as yet quite satisfied, never quite happy, always with a feeling of waiting for something to happen, waiting until he was altogether grown up—at fifty-two! Never very sure of himself, what he owed to others, how much right they, or he, had to dominate. And yet not altogether unhappy; very much amused, in his own sly way, at the odd twists of human nature and conscience; like a sensitive plate to all impressions of beauty or kindness; very curious to know how other people felt, what they thought, how much affection they got out of life—even working people, and servants, whom his own family did not credit with any feelings at all.

The last part of the hill, before the white Cotswold road dropped to the village and rose again through the park to the house, was by far the worst. The horses had been roughened, but even thus they found difficulty in keeping their feet, and every time they slipped Hugh D'Eath bent himself together with a sharp breath. Why couldn't Mary have sent the motor? It was not a fit day to have the horses out. There was a tight feeling in his own chest, a labouring sensation at his heart; it was almost as though he himself were pulling the heavy brougham all these miles against the collar.

Whatever had possessed his forbears to build a house in such a position, at the top of such a hill? To gather a village around its feet, solely for their own convenience, at the end of a little valley—a mere cul-de-sac for the east wind, colder than the open hillside? Just, or so it seemed, that man and beast should have some uphill work, whether they came from or went to the town.

The village with its grey stone houses, very neat and in good repair, looked so cold, with the stripped trees, that it gave an odd impression of "staring" like a horse's coat. The children were still in school, the men at work, every door and window was shut. D'Eath found himself wondering how old Oxley with his bronchitis fared in such weather, and, calling to Barnett through the speaking-tube, bade him stop at the cottage.

Oxley's married daughter opened the door, only a crack giving the impression of a thin slice of highly coloured, choleric femininity. Then seeing the squire she flung it wider and invited him in. "The wind blows some'ut cruel in these 'ere 'ouses, with the doors set as they do be." She spoke with the slow Gloucestershire drawl, but she was not so stupid as she seemed. If the squire would build on a little hallway and sitting-room, with a bedroom over it, there would be accommodation for at least four more lodgers.

Her father was "desperate lear," but what could you expect? "Close on ninety, one can't look fur'un to last long now; not with what we're able to give'un. Though

it's to be hoped as he won't go off yet awhile; fur the ground's as hard as hard, no gettin' a spade into it, so sexton was tellin' me only ter day. 'An' it ain't not ter be expected,' 'e says, says 'e, 'as some'un won't not be spiteful enuff to go dyin' on me afore frosties do break.'"

Old Oxley, in his bed in the kitchen, with the patchwork quilt drawn up to his chin—the kitchen was the warmest place, he was best there, besides, there would be no end to the running about if he were upstairs—glanced sideways at D'Eath with cunning, triumphant eyes. He was the oldest man in the village, and did not mean to render up his proud position by dying yet awhile; besides, he "did 'em in proper" by living—despite all that the sexton might say.

"I looks ter Lord," he said quaveringly. "There ain't nothing that I cares fur now barrin' kingdom o' 'Eaven, an' me bit o' bacco, an' the soup as Miss Mary do send me."

When D'Eath left the cottage he was poorer by a shilling towards tobacco for the old man, and four and sixpence for a legendary fowl killed by a fox the very same night after Lord Egginton had drawn the little spinney at the back of the village. "It's runnin' 'em foxesses as makes 'em that set and bold like," was what old Oxley's daughter said, adding that of course she knew as "'ow the gentry must 'ave their exercise."

Barnett, walking the horses to keep them warm, was unnecessarily far up the road. When he returned his face was set like that of a judge. "Sorry to have kept you waiting, Barnett—this cold and all," murmured D'Eath, while the old man touched his hat, without moving a muscle. He was fond of his master, but when he apologised to him he despised him. Then, to think of taking his horses up and down those hills two days running, and having to keep them waiting in the cold for the sake of that old Oxley and his runt of a daughter. It was too much of a good thing.

Hugh D'Eath, with his agonising faculty for realising what other people thought or felt, pulled his coat collar up tighter round his throat as he huddled back in the corner

of the brougham; bending a little forward over that tiresome heart of his, trying his very best not to drag horses, carriage, coachman, footman, up that last steep mile; working all the harder in that he realised his own want of consideration in keeping them waiting.

Heaven knew that he had not wished to take that drive two days running. He would never have thought of it if it had not been that Tuesday afternoon was the only time Sir Humphrey could see him, and Mary said that it would look so strange if he was not at home again in time for the dance and dinner on Wednesday night.

He had not wanted to come home, and this odd shrinking—almost like the feeling of a boy going back to school—was growing upon him. Several times lately he had been up to town just for one night; if he went for longer it was certain that Mary, or his sister Gertie—who saw a chance of doing some shopping, being taken about in taxis and having their hotel bills paid—would insist on accompanying him; failing them there was Irene or Vera, or even one of the nieces. They used to laugh at him, and say, quite good-naturedly: "You know, darling, you *are* so absent-minded; it really is not safe to trust you alone."

When he went up for only one night they trusted him because there was really so little they could do, so few people they could see in the time.

Sometimes D'Eath used to wonder if there had ever been any man so ruthlessly chaperoned, almost from the very cradle. He thought of this in the brougham, and his mouth twisted to an odd half-smile. "From the cradle to the grave," literally, if things went on as they were doing now. Even after his parents died there had always been his aunts and his eldest sister, who had chosen his rooms at Oxford. When he was twenty-one he had married, with the idea that this step would mean a wider liberty. But it did nothing of the kind. He had wanted to travel, but he could not travel because there was always a baby coming, or just come. Sometimes, in his rueful, whimsical way, he found himself wondering how it happened, or why it always happened.

His wife was a nice woman, a sensible woman, a very good wife and mother. But his eldest daughter, just on thirty by now, was so like her that her place seemed to be filled at once, with no chance of any variety. So much so that Hugh felt himself in the position of a woman who puts on her nightgown before she takes off her chemise—there was no time to feel lonely, chilly. Very often he called Mary "Clara" by mistake. There was no upheaval, no jar, none of those things which make for growth. His other daughters were like his sisters, like his aunts, though less sentimental, a trifle harder; just as obstinate, but without being meek.

True, Irene went in for a classical education—college. For all that she was every bit as narrow as the older generation of women: nothing and nobody was right, worth considering, apart from her own little set. "Outsiders" were as irremediably outsiders as "nobodies" had once been nobodies; she was as self-conscious over her learning and her cigarettes as they had been over their croquet and crinolines. It was just as dreadful to be "proper" as it had once been to be "improper."

Vera, with her young men, her worsted stockings, her brogued shoes, dogs, slang, was incrusted county; so was George in diplomacy—George, who had learnt foreign languages for the sake of passing his examinations and then forgotten them, because it was other people's business to know English, and there "was always a consul chap"; Charles, the soldier, with his sleek head and that stiff, aloof air of a well-bred terrier; and Harold, his Uncle Horace's curate, inclined to be high, as Horace himself had seemed high in the old days.

Sometimes, to Hugh's mind, their reiteration appeared beyond bearing. Then he would reproach himself. It was he who was to blame, he who was different, he who did not care overmuch for horses, hated hunting and pheasant drives, had a sneaking sympathy for poachers, paid away quite a considerable sum in fines for the men whom he was forced by custom, in his capacity of magistrate, to condemn.

Of course it did not do for men to beat their wives, but

through and through him he understood, felt for, the inarticulate exasperation which grew and grew till it overcame Hodge on coming home to the same wife, the same "Wipe yer boots, you great stoopid, an' go round by the back door, an' mind the baby while I get the tea, an' don't you never again let me catch you smellin' o' beer when yer come home a' Saturday night, with sixpence short o' your wages as would 'a gone ter the burial club," day after day, for sixteen years and more.

He felt that, as he felt the desperate, mad misery of the girl who left her hedge-born baby in the ditch, covered with leaves, and dragged on without it, only a mile or so behind the blackguard who owned her—"that dreadfully unnatural creature!" as the married ladies, with nurseries and nursemaids, called her.

He alone of all the magistrates realised the sense of humour which impelled that lout Willy Nash to turn the key on the congregation of "Primitives" just at the very moment when they were singing, "My soul is like a rusty lock," keeping them imprisoned, dinnerless, through the entire length of a stifling summer's afternoon.

They had sung that hymn at Laishen's Chapel when Hugh D'Eath was a child, in exactly the same nasal drawl:

"My soul is like a rusty lock,
Oh, oil it with Thy grace;
And rub it, rub it, rub it, Lord,
That I may see Thy face."

D'Eath's one regret, when he reluctantly condemned the boy to a thrashing from his father, was that he had never thought of that fine irony of turning the key himself at Willy's age.

CHAPTER II

WHEN the hill was at last surmounted, and D'Eath entered the door of his own house, he found that all the furniture had been turned out of the big central hall in readiness for the dance that night, and the whole place was in the hands of gardeners. He heard Vera's laugh and caught sight of a pair of neat heather-tinted ankles half-way up a ladder; from still further aloof sounded the voice of her latest pal—"admirer," the aunts called it.

"Oh, I say, look here, Miss Vera, isn't that a bit of all right'? What's that for a professional—eh?"

From the dining-room came Mary's level tones, in confab with the butler. Irene was in the library, seated at a table surrounded by books, her fingers rather ostentatiously stuffed in her ears: though she glanced up so sharply when her father entered the room that it was evident she was really listening, or expecting somebody else.

There were spots of oil on the study hearthrug and scraps of dirty tow; someone had been cleaning a gun in front of the fire, none too carefully. The fire was very nearly out. D'Eath shivered as he drew up a chair as close as he could get it, and rang the bell; told the young footman to bring some fresh coal, then murmured something about tea.

The coal was brought, dumped on to the dying fire with so much energy that it immediately succumbed; but there was still no sign of tea when, nearly an hour later, Mary appeared on the scene.

"Father, what are you sitting there for? I couldn't make out where you had got to; and the fire dead out on a day like this!"

She rang the bell and ordered sticks and paper; a fresh-faced housemaid appeared, and in a few moments the fire was blazing brightly.

"Why didn't you ring before—make them see to it? Really, dear, don't you think you could look after yourself a little on a day like this, when we're all so busy?"

"I know; I didn't want to give them more trouble than I could help."

"Them! You hopeless man! What about me if I had you laid up with pneumonia? Did you get lunch on the way down?"

"No, I thought I would have some tea directly. I got here; meals in the train are detestable."

"Well, have you had your tea?"

"No; I asked Peter, but perhaps he didn't hear me. And I expect James is having his dinner; he came to the station, you know. A terrible drive he and old Barnett must have had."

"Peter always hears me. If you'd only be a little firmer with the servants, father, it would make it so much easier. But now, tea's in the drawing-room, and the Ewarts have just arrived; so you'd better come along and have it with us." She spoke brightly, glancing over him, past him all the while—mentally rearranging the room for bridge that evening.

"Yes, of course. It's no good having two teas, is it? Everybody as busy as they can be, I suppose."

D'Eath, conscious of the rather meaningless drag of words, felt that he was beginning to say things in an old man's way, as though to appear alert, interested. He hated being meek, and it seemed to him—as it so often did when he was at home, particularly with Mary—that this was what he was growing to be.

And yet he was conscious that he not only spoke but moved like an old man, his hands on the arms of his chair as he raised himself; even Mary noticed it.

"Are you very tired, father? Would you rather have your tea here alone in peace?"

"No, no." A moment before he had hated the very idea of the Ewarts, with their aggressive geniality. Now, of a sudden, he felt that anything was better than being alone.

Mary took his arm; she was genuinely disturbed by his pallor, his air of languor. "You should not go so long without food; you want your tea, that's what it is."

It seemed as though the family could never get away from the immediate needs of the moment, food and drink. And yet during the next hour D'Eath was aware that his eldest daughter's brown eyes, kind and shining, yet in a way so shallow, were constantly sliding past him, as though she did not want to appear to notice. It really was amusing. Did she ignore, or did she only pretend to ignore?

His sister Caroline, with her pronounced D'Eath forehead and chin, that almost overdone matronly air which seems the special heritage of so many country old maids—as though all the good advice they have given in regard to other people's children had endowed them with a pride of vicarious motherhood—glanced up from her knitting when he entered the room; nodded, "So you're back, I see. I hope you had a nice time. Did you run against anyone you know? But I suppose there's scarcely a soul in town so soon after Christmas?" while Vera wanted to know if he had remembered to call for her watch.

Suddenly, for no reason in the world, D'Eath lied. "It wasn't quite finished," he declared; at which Vera jerked her chin, with a remark upon the unreliability of tradesmen. "Really they seem to have no conscience!" she said.

Her father, sipping his tea, sunk deep in a high-winged chair, with that air of a pope, wondered whether the people at the Goldsmiths and Silversmiths' Company would give him away to the next person who called for the watch; and if so, what would be said about *his* conscience? But quite suddenly he had felt that he could not bear the inevitable chorus of "Oh, isn't that just like father?"

if he owned that he had completely forgotten the commission—the watch—Vera herself.

Yes, that was it. For once he had forgotten everyone of them—what they represented in his life. For once—for how many hours?—from three o'clock the day before until he actually saw Barnett sitting on his box outside the station—he had thought of nobody but himself: his whole mind drawn out to a fine point of agonised self-realisation, self-pity.

The only thought he had of his home, of the people so closely interwoven with it, was contained in that indefinable shrinking from the return; the getting back to that routine which, while he changed—had changed so wonderfully during the last few hours that he felt like a person set apart, surveying his world, even himself, from a great distance—still remained so completely the same.

"I wonder if anything, if the upheaval, even the end of the world, would make Caroline drop a stitch?" he thought to himself.

It was so characteristic that, while they all inquired as to his doings, were so interested to hear that he had met Isabel Ingram at the corner of White Horse Street, no single one of them referred to his actual reason for this visit to town.

His brother Horace's two girls were there from the Rectory, and halfway through tea Harold, his youngest son, his uncle's curate—only just ordained and super-clerical in the way he rubbed his hands—came in with a sad, moralising tale of a recalcitrant choir-boy; Harold, only three-and-twenty, already prosy. Then George and Charles appeared with their recital of the day's shooting over Egginton's coverts.

"They've got fifteen people staying in the house for to-night, apart from their own little lot," added George. Then gave an odd, aloof nod in the direction of his wife—so like his kind, almost as loth as a Spaniard to make any acknowledgment of the relationship in public. "That

pretty little Mrs. Filsen's there, Peggy. You'll have to put on your best bib and tucker to-night if you mean to cut her out."

"I can't even hope to be in the running." Peggy D'Eath shrugged her rather thin shoulders; she was slim now—only two-and-twenty, yet in another year or so, thought D'Eath, watchful in his chair, she would be meagre. "I've nothing but that old mauve rag—centuries old."

"Really there's not much to choose between her and old Oxley's daughter," thought her father-in-law, knowing full well that, before the evening was over, he would respond to her insistent "willing" that he should volunteer a new gown for the hunt ball. Sooner or later Peggy always got what she wanted; though it was not by coaxing, rather by some method of wearing down the very fibre of resistance.

He had never criticised his belongings in this way before, he was too habituated to them; for relations are like fashions—you grow accustomed to what you would never have willingly chosen.

But Sir Humphrey's verdict had put him, as it were, "on a mountain apart." These young people of his! How many books had been written of late, how many plays produced with that one theme of the wrongness and tyranny of the old, the clear-sighted analysis of the young?

Suddenly it amused D'Eath to turn the tables. They realised so mercilessly what their elders had arrived at. But really the advantage in criticism was on the side of age. It was more piquant to realise, as he did, exactly whither they, in their turn, were trending. George, for instance, how he laughed at his maternal uncle, the Squire of Thorns, with his narrow pomposity; and yet, even now, George himself might be caught puffing his cheeks, laying down the law, patronising his wife. There was Irene, with a chin like her Aunt Caroline, and just as little humour; and Mary, with her obstinate disregard for "out-

siders"; and Harold, palely unctuous, where his uncle was red, a blend of female cousins in the form of a curate. They were all tending in the same direction; the county had them in its maw, chewing them down to an indistinguishable pulp.

Perhaps that was the real reason for their self-assertion and restlessness—all in the small, confined so to speak; the restlessness that wants parties and people, not worlds. Deep down in their inner consciousness they must have known that they were growing to be exactly like the last generation, or even more the one before that.

Presently the whole party dispersed. There was still plenty to do in preparation for the dance that evening—buttonholes to make, programmes to see to. George asked for the key of the cellar; and, after the delay which inevitably occurred on such occasions, for D'Eath could never remember where he had put it, went off to get out the wine.

The aunts—Caroline, with her chin, ten years older than D'Eath, and Gertie, his youngest, widowed sister, who was still fond of dancing, but needed a good deal of preparation—departed to their own rooms to rest. Usually they lived in their own flat in town, but Christmas in "the dear old home," as Gertie put it, was still one of the laws of the Medes and Persians.

Someone said, "What are you going to do, father? Hadn't you better rest too?" But the question was too careless to need any special answer, and D'Eath remained silent, sitting bent a little forward in his chair, his hands resting upon the arms.

For half an hour there was peace; no one appeared to clear away the tea; now and then, with a soft sigh, some glowing log dropped to grey ash in the wide, open fireplace.

The room was panelled in white, hung with water-colours in gold mounts. During the day it was a trifle chill; but now, in the softened light of shaded lamps, it

appeared charming. There were flowers everywhere, azaleas in pots, and great bowls of hothouse blossoms. It was well arranged—because for many years certain people had grown accustomed to sitting in certain places, drawing their special chairs into the position which suited them—well ordered, shining.

For no reason at all D'Eath's mind suddenly darted away from its rather shamed acknowledgment of Mary's perfection as a housekeeper, to a Salvation Army lass whom he had seen banging her tambourine at the corner of Chapel Street, on his way to Paddington that afternoon.

It looked like fun, life; the lassie's cheeks were almost as red as the ribbons in her bonnet.

And here was he: under glass, as it were.

It really was funny how they had all, every one of them, the two generations siding for once, deliberately avoided any question as to what Sir Humphrey had said.

It was not accidental, but deliberate, prearranged collusion.

Mary had started it. Mary whom everyone declared, and with truth, was such a devoted daughter; Mary who, when any of her female friends suggested marriage, sighed, then smiled brightly, and said: "Oh—well, you see—there's dear father." Father was fanciful, nervous about his heart. It was nothing but indigestion, that was what Doctor Soames said. He had doctored them all, never misled them; there seemed no reason to doubt his word now.

This was the third time her father had been up to see a London doctor. It was evident that he had not been ordered to bed, instructed to change his ways of life. There was not even a prescription.

The whole of the D'Eath family, all the Colburns—Mrs. D'Eath had been a Colburn—were exceedingly strong and healthy. The D'Eaths were thin like wire, the Colburns had the well-covered, plump resilience of india-rubber. True, Mrs. D'Eath had died before she was forty.

But then she died of pneumonia, a definite, well-defined complaint. Directly the doctor saw her he had ordered bed, a cotton-wool jacket, poultices, medicines; one knew where one was. Of course there had been other illnesses in the house, mostly contagious—measles, influenza. But always—the first thing was bed and a prescription.

The prescription seemed like a sort of certificate, carrying with it the right to very special care.

Mary was a competent nurse; kind when people were ill, taking their temperatures, feeling their pulses. Vera stood on the threshold and shouted—"Hullo! how are you? Pretty perky, eh?" Irene did not appear at all, she thought all illness disgusting. As to the aunts, they opened the door a crack, said "I thought I must pop in to see if you have everything you want," and advanced no further, because "one never knows, things *are* so catching!"

Then the old nurse came with her sewing and mounted guard.

That was illness. Everyone knew about it, particularly the housemaids who carried heavy trays, with a great deal of unnecessary silver upon them, up and down steep back stairs.

"If Hugh was really ill, how could he have taken that long journey two days running?" Miss D'Eath had whispered this to her sister Gertie over the tea-table, in a stage whisper that carried farther than any ordinary tone.

There was a moment's pause, for Mrs. St. John had been engaged in calculating how long it would take her—allowing for a good hour's rest—with steaming her face, manicuring, massaging, to make ready for the evening's festivities. Fenton was so slow waving her hair, but then she did it well.

Even when the verdict came it was absent-minded, weighted with more serious matter. "Hugh thinks far too much about himself, that's what it is. When a man gets to his age——"

The remainder of the sentence was lost. But it had set D'Eath wondering what they would, could, have said, had they known how almost fiercely he had been thinking of himself during the last twenty-four hours.

Not that he believed, for one single moment, that Sir Humphrey's verdict was correct. He had already seen two other specialists, and they had only hummed and hawed, advised him to go "a bit slow"—As if he ever did anything else! He was like Noah and his ark, with all those sons, daughters, near and distant relatives, hangers on, tenants; even the very shopkeepers seemed to imagine that they had some sort of proprietary right over him. It had been left to this last famous personage, counting your heart-beats in guineas, to throw out the hint that he might very soon cease "to go" at all. "Like a clock which has got beyond all repairing," D'Eath had thought, though even this did not help to remind him of Vera's watch.

Sir Humphrey believed in telling his patients the truth; but he had done his best not to depress him.

"So long as there's life there's hope." He had used the phrase so often that it had grown to seem original, came with the air of making a discovery. And after all there was no knowing what the course of German waters, which he so strongly recommended to his patient, might do. "The recuperative powers of the human body are almost beyond belief," he declared; and then complimented D'Eath on his coolness and courage.

Curiously enough, if D'Eath was excited at all it was with a sense of adventure. At last things were beginning to happen.

He had always been deeply curious concerning the things of the spirit, the possibilities of an after life. He had thought of it in church, with Horace's sonorous sermons rolling past him. Soon he would be finding out things; he, the unadventurous, launched forth upon the great adventure, supposing that Sir Humphrey Spender had been right.

In any case he felt oddly free, apart from the clogging obligations, affections, of a lifetime.

Almost like a man stripped for a race, with the wind about his limbs.

Someone entered the room with a long sliding step. The master of the house snuggled closer in his chair, hoping that it was only one of the servants to clear away the tea. For he did not want to be disturbed; felt that if Caroline came in, unrolled her knitting, began with "And now, Hugh, tell me what gossip you have brought back from town, what had Isabel to say for herself?" he might equally well scream or curse, even spit; not with the venom of a foreigner, but with the rude, deliberate disregard of an English navvy.

But it was not either of his sisters; neither was it Collins, the butler, for the step, subdued as it was by the depth of carpet, had slid, not paced; while he now realised that the movements around the tea-table were far too delicate to be made by either of the young footmen.

And yet he was left alone, in peace. No one exclaimed "My dear Hugh," or "My dear father—what a start you gave me!"

He peeped round the wing of his chair; a book he had taken up in self-defence, for it provoked exclamations if he was ever found to be sitting in complete idleness, dropped to the floor, a startled voice cried "Oh!" and Susie, his youngest daughter, appeared in front of him upon the hearth-rug.

"I didn't know anyone was here. They've eaten all the buttered toast—pigs! Oh, well, it would have been cold, anyhow." She was nibbling a cocoanut cake as she spoke, biting at it with her front teeth like a squirrel.

"Haven't you had any tea?"

"School-room tea!" Susie stood for a moment nibbling, staring; then returned to the table, armed herself with another cake, again took up her place upon the hearthrug, and recommenced her study of her father—grave, meditative, and yet friendly.

"You look funny, somehow—different—dis—dis—disinterred."

"Oh, surely not quite—though really it might be—but not quite that!"

"No; it's not that. It's—it's—dis—wait a jiffy and I'll get it. Oh, I know; dis—disintegrated."

D'Eath was interested. This word, with which Susie had such difficulty, no one of the others would have thought of it, attempted it. He had seen very little of this youngest child of his; she seemed to be always at school or staying with school friends, or being shepherded out of sight by Mary.

How she had grown; she was almost a woman, though only just seventeen. He knew that, because he remembered a discussion about her frocks, which Caroline had pronounced to be too short. "When I was that age I had my hair up and my dresses below my ankles," she had remarked, while Gertie St. John chimed in with the opinion that girls were so "much more childish for their ages than they had been."

D'Eath thought—gazing at Susie, while Susie gazed back at him—that if girls developed more quickly in Caroline's day they came to an end sooner. Anyhow, there was nothing childish about Susie, though she still stole sweet cakes; she was too wonderfully self-possessed for that.

"But 'disintegrated'? What makes you say that?" he inquired.

"I don't know." Susie shook her head. Her fair hair was parted at one side and drawn in a rather dashing sweep forward over one eyebrow, tied with one big black bow at the top of her head, and another at the extreme tip of a long plait. "But all the same, that's what I feel. You look different—rather as if you had been taken to pieces, made up again, adventurous, Treasure Islandish; and yet sad, like people in love."

"Perhaps it is that we don't see very much of each other." D'Eath spoke gravely, though he had an inward spasm of amusement and perhaps pleasure at his daughter's last words. Then he stretched out one slender hand, and she laid hers in it, very warm and rather red. Her face

was red also—for she had been riding all the afternoon in the bitter wind across the hills, going very slowly out of consideration for her pony's feet—a pure, unbroken oval, pierced by a pair of wonderfully vivid blue eyes, crossed by very straight, fine black brows, which might have been done in by a Chinaman with a camel's hair brush.

To D'Eath's surprise, she raised his hand and held it to her cheek. "You don't see me, but I see you."

"Like a mouse in the wainscoting." The moment the words were out of his mouth D'Eath regretted them: it was the result of that family habit of certain modes of expression for certain ages. But Susie forgave, while she corrected him:

"Well, no, not like a mouse. For mice don't think, at least as far as I know—anyhow, in the way I think."

"What do you think?"

"Oh, I don't know—all sorts of things. How funny grown-up people are."

"You're nearly grown-up."

"Seventeen last month—but grown-up! Oh, no, I should hate it. Somehow it sounds so—so dreadfully finished. Do you know what I think——?" She broke off suddenly as Mary entered the room, glancing at her with that suspicious resentment which most girls feel for the elder sister who takes the mother's place.

"Susie, what are you doing here? Nanny wants to see about the hooks on your frock, and she is so busy! My dear, do look at the crumbs on the hearthrug. When I was your age——"

"You! Oh!" Susie broke in with a little impatient laugh. "But, you see, you were 'then,' and I'm 'now.'

The two sisters went out of the room together, Susie amused, acquiescent, Mary distinctly worried. Nothing, in all her routine of management and duty, had been too much for her as yet, but sometimes she was almost fearful in regard to Susie.

Left alone again, D'Eath reflected that, after all, there was not a great deal more difference in age between himself and his eldest daughter than there was between her and Susie; and yet that, somehow or other, in the odd circling fashion which is so characteristic of life, of the world and everything upon it, he was nearer to this schoolgirl than he was to any single member of his family.

CHAPTER III

THE morning after the dance found the whole household cross and heavy-eyed. No one, excepting Aunt Gertie, stayed in bed. There were the servants, who were extra busy, to consider, and all the people staying in the house—the Ewarts and the Pratt girl, two of Charles's brother officers, and others. Besides, having danced until morning, they all alike declared that they needed exercise. All, that is, save Irene, who had invited a special man-friend of her own, a young Cambridge poet, who preached the gospel of revolt and social equality, yet had his breakfast in bed—oh, yes, there was another exception—despite the fact that the servants had been up long after he and his kind, while if he had acted up to his convictions it was he who should have carried them their breakfasts up the steep and narrow back-stairs to the top storey—a Socialist who preferred China tea to Ceylon, which he declared only fit for scullery maids and other "common" people.

Irene and her young man, when he did appear, elected to spend their morning smoking cigarettes over the study fire, discussing Omar and the Webbs on "Destitution," staring coldly at D'Eath, inquiring if he was looking for anything when he appeared upon the threshold of what was supposed to be his own special sanctum.

There seemed, indeed, nowhere for him to bestow himself. Mary and a footman were rearranging furniture in the drawing-room. A man from town was ironing the billiard table. The smoking-room was empty, but there was no fire, and one of the outdoor servants was cleaning the windows.

Once, during a crisis of poverty and starvation, some

writer in "The Annals of Agriculture"—surely the most pompous, brutal, narrow-minded production which has ever disgraced any country—proposed that the poor should, with their families, resort to the stables for warmth during the winter months, in place of wasting time in seeking for firewood or money in buying it.

It seemed to D'Eath that with his ancestral mansion—item, twenty or more bedrooms; one drawing-room, with six windows and a desert of flowered carpet, in possession of Mary and the footman; one study, with a sofa and quite six arm-chairs, and a wood fire large enough to roast an ox, monopolised by Irene and her young man; one smoking-room, fireless; one billiard-room, ditto; one morning-room, with Caroline doing up the washing-book to help dear Mary, resenting any intrusion because she counted on her fingers; one gun-room, warmed by a good fire, but fully occupied and odoriferous, with a spaniel suffering from distemper and being "made comfortable in the house"; with an immense dining-room—another roaring fire and Peter clearing away breakfast—besides no one ever *did* sit in a dining-room—that the only chance for the master of all this was the stable: the stable and Frazer's "Golden Bough," to which he always resorted when the pressure of everyday life, his position, all that was expected of him became almost more than he could bear.

He moved rather disconsolately into the hall and stood there; his hands in his pockets, whistling softly to himself, that type of whistle which means boredom and a sort of dismay.

It was not as though he had nothing to do. There were piles of letters to be written; a new book upon the Balkan troubles lay on his dressing table uncut; any moment the groom might be expected back from Chingford with the *Times*—and the *Daily Mail* for the servants; the keeper wanted to see him about the loss of some young pheasants, the foxes were getting beyond a joke. He had half promised to walk over to Longford Farm with Cherry, the agent, and see whether a new floor was really needed

in the cow-sheds, as the tenant said it was; or whether said tenant was merely joggling his elbow, reminding him of his responsibilities as landlord, insisting upon dilapidations, with one eye upon a reduction in rent, as Cherry declared was the case.

Then there was that meeting of the Board of Guardians at Chingford. Oh, there was no end to the things which were waiting to be done, and at the very thought of which his gorge rose.

Apart from all this, what was it Toms had said about marking trees that morning?—sandwiching it in 'twixt bitter complaints of the way the poor people, to whom the squire had given permission to gather wood, were breaking down, and carrying away the fences.

"Well, one thing's certain," muttered D'Eath to himself. "I'll be hanged if I'll go and mark trees to-day, anyway." His mouth twisted into a smile, which he never used for any save his own inanities, as he thought of Sir Humphrey, with his fat white hands, lopping off his own special branch of that family tree which had shaded Dene Royal for centuries; visualised himself upon his knees —"Oh, woodman, spare that tree!"

He moved over to the barometer hanging at the side of the front door. It was going down. Yes, they had all remarked upon that at breakfast. The thaw was certain to bring rain; it was much milder. But they would pay for it. Last year the snow had not come until late in February, and then how it had hung about.

The weather! Good Lord, what was he, what was the world coming to? People talked perpetually about the weather, as they had talked that morning, all feeling a little chilly with fatigue. Old Ewart, who had accompanied his daughters, never talked about anything else; he was a very Plato of the weather—if it did not rain it would be fine, and if it were not fine it would rain. When they were not talking about it, they did as he was doing now—they went and tapped the glass.

Collins appeared at his elbow. "Please, sir, Mr. Davies

is here"—Davies was the bailiff—"asking if you will be able to go over to the Home Farm this morning."

"No!" D'Eath snapped out the word. The next moment he was sorry. After all, it was not Collins's fault that things were as they were; no need to speak like a cad to the old fellow. He felt like going after him, apologising, with a hand on his shoulder. Poor old Collins!

The next moment, however, Collins was back again, with a martyred and apologetic air.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir"—it was as if, even in his pain, the old man, so accustomed to the ritual of country-house life, realised the importance of that tapping of the glass, the mental concentration required—"but Mr. Davies says will you please tell him if you gave Mrs. Bulger leave to send her little boy for a pint of milk each evening? And was it to be charged to the farm accounts or to the house?"

"Oh, I suppose it's best to charge it to the house, Collins. Less confusing for Davies's accounts, eh? What do you think?"

D'Eath was paying, as he always did pay, for his flashes of impatience; for Collins, from merely being a martyr, mounted his high horse.

"I'm sure I can't say, sir. I attend to my own work. If the outside men would be a little more methodical in their arrangements, it seems to me as how it might be better for all concerned; if you'll excuse me mentioning it, sir."

It was then that D'Eath—thinking that he might as well submit to fate, be as martyred as his butler, choose the course he most disliked, order out a trap and drive into Chingford, which was their town, but not their station, for the Guardians' meeting at eleven-thirty—glanced up and saw Susie descending the stairs in her riding habit. They exchanged greetings, and she was already at the front door—he rather dejectedly turned towards the stairs—when she swung round and spoke, a little wistfully.

"I suppose you wouldn't come for a ride, father?"

"Why, yes," he was as pleased as a child at the suggestion. "The very thing! I was wondering what to do with myself. Where are you going?"

"Oh, I don't know. Unless you want to do anything particular, let's go up to The Hills."

"Right for you. If you are going out to the stables tells Griggs to saddle Trumpeter; I won't be five minutes."

He was strangely elated. He saw so little of Susie, she almost held the attraction, the possibilities of a stranger. It was nice of her asking him to go with her. They so seldom wanted him. Only a few days earlier he had heard Vera and Irene disputing as to who should accompany him to Cottingham. "I don't know why you should always expect me to do that sort of thing," Vera had remonstrated. "I know I went last time."

Now here was Susie, who sounded a little wistful, lonely; it was as though someone had thrown a thread across the hall, more across the intervening years, linking them in sympathy.

Sir Humphrey had told him to be especially careful going up the stairs; but he took them at a run; seemed none the worse, save for a slight giddiness when he stooped to pull on his boots.

For a quarter of a mile or so he and Susie rode in single file through a coppice of firs, intermixed with dwarfed oak. Thence they emerged upon a road between stone wall, with closely cropped, greyish green fields to either side, where a few sheep and bullocks grazed with meekly bent heads.

They cut through the back of the Home Farm, where Davies was carting manure, through the stack-yard, past the sheds with the carts and agricultural implements, the scratching hens, the scent of bone manure and pollen; and then, still mounting, came out into a deep muddy cart-track with high banks at either side.

Above them, to the right, were The Hills, smooth-turfed, rolling, fold upon fold; to the left a sweep of dark choco-

late soil, topped—right against the horizon, the wispy grey sky—by two brown horses, a man and a plough.

At last the track ended, quite suddenly, and the riders were launched upon the wide, open surface of the hillside, with the man and the plough cutting the shoulder of it far below them. Still they pushed on, until at last the very top was reached, a Brobdingnagian rib near a mile in width stretching as far as the eye could reach, narrowing in some places, widening in others, trailing its green mantle to the very edge of the Tewkesbury plain, with its rivers like slips of silver shoe-strings. From here they could see Cottingham, almost beautiful with its blue mists and its spires, village after village, hamlet after hamlet, madder-tinted spinneys, velvet-dark gorse, and, above all, that wide sweep of torn grey sky.

D'Eath drew rein and sat bent forward in his saddle, gazing across the plain to where the Malvern Hills, faint as a harebell, just pencilled the sky.

The air was fresh but not cold, very different from the day before. No wonder the glass had fallen, there was already a soft splutter of rain against his cheek.

The ploughman, the brown horses, had moved away from the edge of the bluff, were almost indistinguishable in colour from the soil against which they were flattened.

Each year there came complaints from the man who rented the little grey farm on the side of the hill, that the heavy rains, flooding down the steep incline, washed the seed from out of the ground, and yet he still ploughed up and down instead of across and across. Cherry had spoken to him about it, but he declared it had always been done that way in his father's time, his grandfather's, his great-grandfather.

D'Eath, glad of a moment's rest—for in his old way he had seemed to have accomplished the greater part of that steep climb upon his own nerves and heart—pointed out the plodding figure to his youngest daughter, commented upon old Yeld's obstinacy. Would Susie reply, like Mary,

that she supposed Yeld had some reason for doing as he did?

But no, the corners of Susie's mobile, rather long-lipped mouth twitched. "It's like Henri Fabre's 'Pine Processional Caterpillars,'" she remarked.

"Like——.! What in the world?"

"They're a sort of caterpillar, a sort that's always walking—like schoolgirls ages ago, in old Mary's day—long lines of them, the tip of the nose of each one just touching the tip of the tail of the fellow in front of him. I read about it in a book I found the other day—topping, it was! Certain insects are just like certain people. Really, truly, father, I made out a list of all the people I know, an insect for every one. There's Yeld, for instance, just going on and on for all the world like a Pine Processional. One day Fabre started a long line of them walking round a large flower-pot, and when they encircled it he nipped off the rest. Could you believe it?—of course you could, you know, we know"—her glance was full of laughing fellowship—"heaps of people are just the same—they kept on and on round that flower-pot for seven whole days! They got thinner and thinner and more and more exhausted; they were not going anywhere, they would never arrive at anything, but still they went on. There were heaps of pine needles close at hand—sort of cake to them you know—but they wouldn't turn aside, wouldn't stop." She paused with a little shrug. "Sounds rotten, doesn't it? But if people weren't so stupid the world wouldn't be half so funny as it is."

She glanced sideways at her father. D'Eath realised that she was acting, talking up to him, and yet there was that intelligent desire to please, interest, of which no one of the others had ever shown the faintest trace.

Her pony was jumping out of its skin with impatience. jerked at the rein; it took both hands to hold him. D'Eath watching her, realised the tenseness of arm and wrist, the fine strong curve of the straight young back. Her face was flushed by the wind; the fine rain, whinh was really little

more than a mist, had powdered her golden brown hair and short, dark lashes with tiny drops of moisture.

"He's spoiling for a gallop. Oh! I say, let's race," she cried; shook the reins with a whoop and was off.

D'Eath followed; scraps of soil, tiny pebbles, scattered up into his face from the pony's flying hoofs as it hunched itself to the gallop in that odd way which ponies have. The moist air was still, save for the stir made by their own passage through it; but from far below them came the sound of peewits crying over the bare furrows, like a sad, small wind through a keyhole.

After a while he drew rein, for his heart was beating so that it almost suffocated him. But he was conscious of a melancholy sort of reluctance to give up this race, which had seemed like a challenge to friendship, equality. He liked Susie when she was quaintly cynical, but he liked her better when she had cried, "I say, let's race," with all her white teeth showing in a friendly grin.

She realised that he was not following, and came back slowly, a little crestfallen. "You didn't try. And yet I had not even said 'give me a start,' though Trumpeter—well, look at the length of his legs, and look at Ginger's! I wouldn't have minded being beaten, but just to give up, say nothing!" It was plain that she was bitterly disappointed in him.

D'Eath felt that he could not bear it, that he must have at least this one person—this one member of the family which he had so consistently indulged—upon his side, and bent his pride to an excuse. "I'm not altogether fit just now. I don't think I ought to ride too awfully hard."

"But exercise! Exercise is good for almost everything," answered the girl, still rueful. This time it was D'Eath himself who was disappointed. After all she was just like the others, he thought. But still he retained sufficent spirit to retort, "Pine Processionalist!" and was rewarded by seeing Susie's aggrieved air swept away by a look of amused contrition.

"My hat! Doesn't that just show how one catches things? At school if you're not well you must stay indoors and keep warm; here you must take exercise. I've been at home three weeks, and this is the result. But—I'm awfully sorry, father."

They were moving on, side by side now. The mist had thickened, walling them in with a not unpleasant privacy. "We'll have to keep straight along the hilltop until we get to Mars Lane, or we'll be breaking our necks down a quarry. I say, mind; more this way."

Susie put out her whip hand and just touched her father's; he seemed in a dream, and there was the excuse of drawing him a little more to the left. But her expression was almost maternal. She remembered how he had looked when she first chanced upon him in the drawing-room the evening before; how Mary had spoken of his having been up to London to see a doctor, and then how everybody seemed to have ignored him.

"Father, do tell me. What did that doctor say about you?"

"Nothing very much."

"But he did, I know he did." Susie spoke with sudden, intense conviction. "I know he did. He said something—something—oh, something epoch-making."

"Child, what words you use."

"Well, he did. That's what's altered you so."

"How altered me?"

"Well, you are altered. You were altered last night, that's what started me."

"Started you what?"

"Well, making your acquaintance, like a real person, not a parent. Something had happened, I knew it had—something sort of dithering. You looked, you know, like a kid that's got a secret—or got lost. Yes, that's it; a little bit frightened, and yet awfully excited at having found its way outside the park wall; wondering, oh, wondering, tremendously what it will meet with next."

"'Pon my word, you are an oddity!"

"Well, so are you. I didn't realise it before, but that's why we've suddenly, quite suddenly, chummed up. Oh, it's my luck, just the very day before I go back to school! And after being so lonely all this time!"

"Have you been lonely, Susie?" D'Eath in his turn put out his hand, laid it upon hers.

"Frightfully." The girl had turned her head aside, but the smooth curve of her cheek was crimson. For a moment there was silence between them; then she drew her hand away and wiped her doeskin glove across her eyes. Something had touched the back of D'Eath's hand, too large, too perfect to have any connection with the drizzling rain. He was aghast. "Susie, Susie, my dear!" he exclaimed, and then added something incoherent to the effect, "If only your mother had lived."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," murmured the girl dismally; then caught up her words again fiercely: "She wouldn't have made any difference; you know she wouldn't. Why, did she ever make any difference to you?"

What could he answer? Had she made any difference to him? No, rather she had helped to keep him as he was, taken the reins, the bit and curb from Caroline, handed them on to her replica, Mary. D'Eath had an idea that he ought to say something to the effect that Susie was wrong, that there was "no one like a mother." But he could not bring himself to do it, to put her definitely away from him with those platitudes which youth realises so clearly. There was no one like a mother. Yes, that was all right; but only if she happened to be not merely a good mother, but the sort of mother who understood you.

"We'd better go on," muttered Susie half sulkily, "or we'll be late for lunch, and then there'll be a fuss."

D'Eath did not reply. He was thinking of his own mother, who had existed for him during his early childhood between six and seven each evening, and on Sundays when nurse had her afternoon out; those Sundays which seemed as though they must be unchangeably connected with "Peep o' Day," and rather slippery, silken knees

which never made quite a lap. As he grew old enough for a preparatory school, there had been the holidays, when she seemed to notice very little about him save his hands, with their dirty nails; and then, when he went on to Harrow, occasional visits, during which it had been dreadfully, ever-increasingly difficult to know what to talk about.

Later on had come that trip abroad. Hugh D'Eath's parents had spent their honeymoon at Bath. Always they had said, "With Scotland and Wales, and the dear Lakes, there is so much to be seen in our own country." But suddenly a specialist—and that came of consulting strange doctors who know nothing of your habits, your constitution—had recommended a winter abroad for Mrs. D'Eath's bronchitis, had packed her and her husband off to the South of France, almost before they knew what they were doing. There they had lost their lives in a railway accident, when Hugh was but just nineteen years of age. And that was what came of foreign travel! Though, of course, there were railway accidents in England, but not so bad; and at least one was among one's own people, not among foreigners.

Father and daughter cut down Mars Lane, 'twixt high hedges still red with hip and haw, then out on to the main Cottingham Road, and so home. Once Susie remarked:

"It is not really how much one's related outwardly; it's what you feel inside that counts. If you can only just see that someone's thinking like you, amused by the same sort of things."

The words were platitudinous enough, like most of the wise words of youth; but the disconnected fashion in which they were uttered pleased D'Eath. It showed how entirely Susie was growing to be at her ease with him, how their thoughts ran in the same direction. After a while she again inquired what the doctor had said to him, and he found himself telling her, quite simply and frankly. There was something wrong with his heart. Sir Humphrey took a serious view of it, a ridiculously serious view, for after all, if the worst did come to the

worst—— He hesitated, but Susie tracked his thought to its end:

"You mean that life's no great shakes anyway?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose I have everything a man can want. But death is a sort of adventure; the only one, it seems, that's left to me; the only one which I am likely to have—well, unchaperoned."

He had hesitated at the word "death," a little fearful of what effect it might have upon the girl. For people shirk it; there is no doubt about that. "If the worst should happen," they will say; or, "If I shouldn't get better." Even the half-profane expressions, such as "If I pan out," "if I kick the bucket," "pop off," seem to have something bigger, more universal, than themselves at their cot, the fear of "the word."

But quite young people are less easily appalled at the idea of death than their elders. Susie's face was full of tenderness and grave concern, but it showed no fear.

"It's pretty bad, pretty awful, to feel that one would be glad to be out of it. But, then, we all do that at times. I know I do."

D'Eath glanced up half startled, half amused. This chit of seventeen with her radiant youth! He was on the edge of a laugh—the sting of which might have rankled in the girl's mind for years—when he pulled himself up sharply, remembering how he had seriously contemplated suicide at much the same age, because a beloved mongrel pup—a long-legged, yellow, flea-infested creature of quite indeterminate breed—had been condemned to death for poaching.

"I don't think, yet awhile at least, that we need tell the others—Mary—what that man said," he remarked after a pause, rather anxiously. He could not have said why he had spoken as he had done to Susie; was distressed and shy as a lover at the very thought of having this new element in his life, this prospect of something fugitive and yet liberating, discussed, fingered over.

"Mary!" answered Susie with scorn. "My dear! she would *expect* you into dying. She would order her mourn-

ing at the sales—and then what *could* you do? I don't believe, oh, not for a moment, that it's true. The old fellow might be right, only, you see, he could never realise that he was making life so much more interesting for you; you simply had to go on living. Mary would write the whole thing down ahead in her diary, if he said six months or a year Oh, I know that's how she does it. Tell Mary? Good Lord, no!"

CHAPTER IV

SIR HUMPHREY had insisted that D'Eath must come and see him again within a month, "That is unless you have already started for Germany, which is, of course, what I should like you to do," he had added. "Though in any case you would see me first. I would write to a man I know. There would be certain matters to arrange."

All the time that he was speaking the specialist had been troubled by the unfamiliar feeling that he could not be quite sure whether or no he was making any special impression upon his patient. Usually it was all the other way; people broke down, were perplexed, excited, or else keyed up to a white-faced, tight-lipped endurance. But this man, with his delicate, clear-cut face, dreamy blue eyes, odd, whimsical mouth, seemed, one might almost say, pleasantly intrigued by the idea of death. Or, perhaps, after all, it was merely that he did not believe what the great man told him. It might have been this irritating doubt which had driven Sir Humphrey at the very last—snatching back the "while there's life there's hope" consolation with one hand, as it were—to say, "Of course, I may be wrong; but personally—well, as you ask me to be frank, a year in England, possibly two or three if you decide to go to Nauheim, do exactly as I tell you, take no risks."

D'Eath had taken no risks. But he had not gone to Germany. The very thought of it bored him beyond words. If it had been Italy now, that would have been a different affair altogether. Though would it? With Mary and her Baedeker, and Vera longing for the dogs, and Irene in the long vacation—Irene with her contempt for everything old.

Bit by bit that curious sense of not unpleasant excite-

ment roused in him by his visit to the specialist died away. He did not believe, not for a moment, that anything was going to happen. Unless it were possible for a man to die of fatigue.

And how tired he was, how everlastingly tired; more tired when he got up in the morning than when he went to bed at night; faint with fatigue sitting on the Bench, at the Board of Guardians, at the agricultural show, the puppy show, the Cottingham races, where it seemed that all the country people stuck out their chins, wore their hats with a tilt—even Horace, who attended the races but did not bet—in an endeavour to look particularly keen and rakish.

George's wife was staying at Dene Royal awaiting her confinement, bitterly resentful. "Such an expense," she declared. "And when we both hate children! If it had been puppies, now." Mary fluttered round her continually; poor Mary, glowing with hope, and a sort of excitement over an affair which had nothing whatever to do with her. D'Eath, catching sight of the expression on his eldest daughter's face one afternoon, as she unpacked a box of tiny, almost incredibly fine garments which had arrived for Peggy by post three days ago, and which she had been too indifferent even to open, felt more drawn to her than he had ever been. So Mary was not altogether so well satisfied as she appeared. He remembered when she first came out how particular she had been, how she looked down upon the odd men who came to Cottingham for the balls. "Not quite our sort," she would say in her level, mulish way. Well, she had not even picked up a crooked stick, as yet, anyhow, and she was becoming more and more set every day; she was not by any means plain, but there was a sort of baldness about her face, a want of expression and understanding, which put men off. Then she could see nothing but the obvious. Now, when her father went up to her, laid one hand upon her shoulder, she inquired if he wanted anything, not satirically or impatiently, but with an obvious insensitiveness to the human touch.

Vera was really engaged to that young Helstone, who had helped her with the decorations for the dance—a very good match, so everybody said. Hugh used to watch them, and wonder and wonder. Somehow or other they made him feel very small, very childish. He expected them to be in love as he understood love—something shy and wonderful, full of wonder and a half-fearful joy. He had been afraid of everything when he himself was engaged, distrustful beyond words of his own unworthiness, and yet wrapped in a magical rose-coloured veil, through which he could see nothing quite plainly.

It had not lasted; it had all been a dream, with only one dreamer. But still he had dreamt. In Vera's engagement he had half hoped to live that too short moment over again, even if it was only vicariously. Perhaps it was true what Irene said: "The older people are regular vampires, battening on the young." But, no, his third daughter and young Helstone showed their affection for each other—what they had to spare from the dogs and horses, which they both adored, upon which they lavished words, caresses, never even thought of in connection with one another—merely by a display of rudeness, a fire of chaff and personalities. In another stratum of society they would have exchanged hats, slapped each other in an exuberance of high spirits. Tony Helstone declared that he had only asked Vera to marry him out of pity, to which Vera counterfeited with the obvious retort that no one else would have him.

And yet out of doors the sap was stirring in the trees, quivering to life in tight, translucent buds of jade and ruby, birds were mating, wilder with joy than they could ever be with fear; the windflowers, those wonder children of aged winter, were out in the woods; everything in Nature was as adorably young, as fresh, as ardent as though it were the very day after Creation.

Susie did not come home for the Easter holidays. She had wanted to go to some school friend in Yorkshire just for a week, and then come back to Dene Royal. It was not until her father, who had counted the days, asked what train

she was expected by that Mary told him she was not coming at all. "Mrs. Erskine wrote saying how they liked having her, how she seemed to be enjoying herself; so I thought that she had much better stay on, as they asked her. I really have no time to see to her—with Peggy and all. Then it's such a journey, and only three weeks' holiday."

D'Eath was appalled. "But d-did she want to stay?"

Mary glanced up at her father in surprise; he had spoken so hotly, with that slight stutter which came to him in moments of excessive emotion, looked so flushed and odd. Certainly people did get difficult to deal with as they grew older.

"She was wild to go. It seemed much better that she should stay. It does not do to get into the way of consulting girls of that age; they're too fond of chopping and changing."

"Well, you had no business to settle a thing like that without consulting me—no business whatever! To banish Susie in that fashion!"

"'Banish,' father!"

"Yes, banish."

Mary's eyes dropped to the sewing, which she had taken from her little basket—the basket which had been her mother's, lined with crimson quilted satin. D'Eath was furious, could have shaken her; all the more furious from the realisation that she regarded all anger as something almost indecent. She had a small square of white linen in her hand, was drawing out the threads, replacing them with others at an infinite sacrifice of time and eyesight.

"I always imagined that you liked me to manage in the way I thought best," she remarked quietly.

"As you think best, of course, in the house and all that! But in a case like this! Good heavens! Am I never to see anything of Susie?"

"I don't know that I ever thought of it like that; you never seemed to take any great interest in her until just the end of the Christmas holidays. I know when I begged and entreated you to help me settle about her school—why, even

her confirmation—I couldn't get you to say anything. "I am sure I have no desire to take any responsibility upon myself; it's a thing I've no taste for. But when poor mother died, and there was a question of Aunt Caroline and Aunt Gertie giving up their flat, living here altogether, you didn't seem to wish it. Though, of course, it would have made it much easier for me."

"Of course I did not wish it—anything—anything but that. I had been 'managed,' brought up practically, by Caroline. At least, I thought I would spare you that."

"I am sure you thought you were doing what was for the best; and if—things—oh, well, we need not speak about that. But now, when I have given up everything, devoted myself as I have done—— Dear father, really it does seem a little hard; to feel that you resent"—Mary hesitated, then again added—"things." It was a word she was fond of; put to many uses in her rather limited vocabulary—"my things," or "marriage and death and things like that" or "things that aren't quite nice," "things that no one does," "things that no one talks about." When as a girl of Susie's age she had been taken to see Doré's pictures, she described them as being all "heaven and hell and things." In his inmost consciousness D'Eath realised that she had given up nothing, that the greatest of all "things" had simply passed her by; and his anger having cooled down to a flat sense of disappointment and loss, intermingled with pity for Mary, he was repentant, apologetic: "No, no, my dear, not that. Do you think I don't realise that there never was such a daughter—such a manager? And in everything it's the same; Horace is always saying he simply doesn't know what he would do without you in the village. I'd no business to speak as I did; but, well, frankly, I was disappointed at the thought of not seeing Susie all this holiday."

In a moment Mary had darted back; so long as he was angry she had submitted, with nothing more than a meek complaint, but her next remark was like a peck.

"You began to take notice of Susie last holidays, and it didn't improve her. I'm sure we all noticed it"—Mary

seldom made an assertion altogether on her own behalf, formed herself and her family into a sort of phalanx—"it doesn't do with a girl of that age. She was quite out of hand, and after all, as I'm the one who has to manage her——"

She bit off her sentence, as she had a habit of doing when she was put out; a less well-bred woman might have bitten her thread sharply, with a grimace. So that was it, thought D'Eath. He was not considered "good for" Susie —or was it that Susie was not good for him? Mary was an exemplary woman, but it sometimes seemed as though all her sex had run to petty tyrannies, jealousies.

"You won't forget that Lord and Lady Egginton are coming to dinner to-night, will you, father? And Uncle Horace wanted to see you about the new hassocks," she added, after a moment's pause, which D'Eath took to mean that he was pardoned, that nothing more would be said on the subject of Susie and her holidays.

And yet, if he had insisted, there was still time for her to be recalled. But would she wish it? Was she not happier where she was? Mrs. Erskine was a jolly soul; there were plenty of boys and girls about the house.

And after all he was an old fogey.

CHAPTER V

Six weeks later D'Eath was in London again. He had meant to go and see Sir Humphrey; but he went down to Sunningdale first, paid Susie a surprise visit, and after that was too greatly depressed to care very greatly what happened to him.

For that dreadful paralysis, which had overcome him on similar occasions, when his own mother had visited him at school, seemed to have infected them both, as though it were a sort of microbe for ever present in those chill drawing-rooms where parents are received. Susie and he had nothing to say to each other. When he suggested taking her out to lunch she proposed that he should take her friend, Rosie somebody, as well. "The Erskine girl—no, thank you! I stayed with the Erskines for three weeks at Easter!" That was what she had said. Meanwhile it seemed that she held Rosie, the school-games and prizes, the inanities of the mistresses, up as a sort of shield between her father and herself. She was very polite, interested in everything he had to say; but that was all. After lunch they went for a walk, but it was Rosie, a pasty-faced, eager-to-please girl, who did most of the talking. There were two trains back to town—one at three fifteen and one at five. When D'Eath declared that he must catch the three fifteen there was a distinct sense of relief evident, though it was Rosie who said: "Oh, then you *will* be able to play cricket this afternoon, Susie, after all. That's topping!"

D'Eath did not believe that Susie was awfully keen about cricket, that this had anything to do with it. But it was only at the station, during the very last moments—with his train actually in sight, with Rosie engaged in choosing papers, spending half a crown for him at the bookstall

—that he gathered some insight into the true state of affairs.

"How's Ginger?" inquired Susie nonchalantly, looking the other way, down the line at the train.

"Very fat, but dullish, I fancy. I took him a carrot the other day, and he'd hardly look at it. He wants you back, as we all want you."

"And yet you made me stay at those beastly Erskines' all the holidays."

"*I? Made* you?"

"Well, you 'thought it best'—at least, that's what Mary said, and as you didn't write—I suppose if I had begged and prayed, but catch me doing that!" Susie spoke sulkily; but she spoke like herself, unlike the admirable automaton of the last two hours.

"My dear, I said nothing. I was longing for you to come, bitterly disappointed."

"And yet you said nothing. Well, if I wanted anything very, very much——" She pulled herself together with a jerk, remembering her own words as to begging and praying, "catch me." And yet her father was different, of course he could do as he liked. No, it seemed as though they were at an *impasse*. There was nothing more to be said; she had lost confidence in him. The train was in, and Rosie was pressing sporting and picture papers upon him, the sort of papers she liked.

"Thanks awfully," said Susie. "It was most awfully good of you to come down." Her face was very red, her lips pressed tightly together, a flat, unyielding surface as D'Eath kissed them. The platform was crowded; third-class passengers were pushing their way into the carriage.

"Susie, don't you believe me?" cried D'Eath, just as the train was moving off, and saw that Susie turned, that her eyes were swimming in tears, that she was biting in her under-lip. Then her face was shut away from him, there was a momentary glimpse of her bright, emerald-green tam-o-shanter above the drab, indistinguishable heads of the crowd, but in a breath that also was lost to sight.

"I think he's the most perfect dear! And so awfully distinguished looking!" cried Rosie, clinging to her friend's arm as they moved out of the station together. "I say, do you know what he did? Gave me a sov, for chocolates, he said. Frightfully decent of him, wasn't it? Did he——? But of course."

"Yes." Susie spun her sovereign in the air to show how little she cared for it; then, in an agony of apprehension, saw it drop to the ground, roll towards a grating. Not that she would have minded, everything was altogether tob rotten to bother about money, but she needed some photographic plates, owed that Staverley girl eighteenpence for potted meat—frightfully dear, and all mouldy on top.

As the two girls straightened themselves after a prolonged but effectual grovel in the mud, where the sovereign had completely buried itself, Rosie remarked: "Look here, do you know what I think? Miss Birrell's most awfully gone on him; she was as pink as anything when she came to call you, and her nose all twitching like a rabbit's. It must be perfectly frightful to be a schoolmistress, never to see any men except the masters, who don't count. Now I think men——"

"Oh, men!" ejaculated Susie scornfully, rubbing her sovereign with her handkerchief.

"Well, of course, only certain sort of men," amended Rosie disconnectedly, glancing sideways at her companion, for it was always Susie who was the leading spirit.—"One might imagine that you had some reason to think yourself cleverer, more distinguished than any of the other girls," that's what Miss Birrell had said, instructing her on the ornament of a meek and contrite spirit; and—"Well, somebody's got to think it!" had been the retort; "what a muddle it would make if every kid in the school gave in to every other."—"Men like your father," went on Rosie, meandering, as Susie called it; "do you know who he made me think of?"

"Who?"

"Liszt."

"Liszt!" repeated Susie, with a short laugh. She was feeling very flat and depressed, distrustful of herself and the world in general, was glad of the chance of being nasty to someone, even her faithful vassal Rosie. "Well, I never! Good Lord, after taking that sovereign, and lunch and all, and ginger-beer at Shepherd's!"

"Why, whatever have I said? What's wrong?"

"Well, the sort of person he was! Have you ever read a life of Liszt? Huh!" For a moment or so Susie moved on in silence, taking no notice of her companion's confused apologies. Then her sense of humour triumphed, and she broke into a laugh.

"Poor old father! As if he—— My word, I bet he often wishes he had! Olga Janina—Marguerite Gautier—Lola Montez—George Sand—and poor old father with Mary! Oh, my hat!"

CHAPTER VI

It was the last week in June when D'Eath again visited London, and called to consult Sir Humphrey. It had been an unusually hot and early summer; even at Dene Royal the nights had seemed stifling. The fatigue which overhung him instead of growing less, as he had half expected it would, with the coming of the warm weather—for his sister Caroline had mesmerised him into the belief that all his ills were the result of rheumatic tendencies—became more and more pronounced, so that he was at last driven to feel that something must be done, that he could no longer go on as he was doing.

The great physician was haughty and distant. It was almost as though he said: "If you like to go on living in this miserable condition instead of doing the really firm thing, dying or getting well, I wash my hands of you."

But still he very greatly impressed Mary, who had insisted upon accompanying her father. Once again Nauheim was declared to be "the thing"—the only thing, and Mary promised that she would use her influence. That meant the influence, the entire weight of the family against him. D'Eath realised this, and it did little to cheer him.

They returned to Dene Royal that same evening because of Peggy—"Well, it might be any day now"—George was already there, in waiting, and the nurse. "Just like our luck!" that was Peggy's constant cry. It was as though she imagined her condition to be the least expected outcome of matrimony.

It was almost unbearably hot in the train. Sitting in his corner staring out of the window, D'Eath's thoughts ran like an aimless toy-mouse, round and round with the lines:

"I wish I were dead now,
Or down in my bed now,
To cover my head now,
And have a good cry."

For the life of him he could not have said where he had heard them or read them; if they were somebody else's, or the outcome of his own imagination.

The whole carriage was filled with the sickening odour of brandy; for Mary, quietly watchful now that he was, so to speak, certified, realising his weakness, had unscrewed the top of the flask, so as to have it ready.

Several times she asked him if would not put up his feet, and when he answered in the negative, none too patiently, thought how difficult men were; felt glad to reflect that she had always been sensible enough to decide against marriage.

At the station, waiting for his luggage, Barnett touched his hat. "Bad news, isn't it, sir?"

"What news?"

"Oh dear, I beg your pardon, sir, I made certain you'd have heard. They won't have Mr. James. I'm sure I don't know what things are coming to, Socialism or such like, I call it."

"Mr. James" was the eldest son of their late member, who had died a few months earlier. The greater part of Mr. James's life had been spent in Java; Gloucestershire knew him not, though Barnett remembered him as a little boy. He was just returning to settle at home when his father died. Really the whole thing seemed providential: if old Staunton had to die—and he was close on eighty—there was his son all ready to step into his shoes. Nothing could be better. Besides, they had thought a great deal, really a very great deal, of James Staunton—in Java.

But now the committee had refused even to nominate him; had chosen a nobody. For a Conservative constituency, too, where people really did expect to get somebody who was somebody.

No wonder Barnett was disturbed. It was likely enough that the seat might pass over to the Liberals, and the Liberals were near to Socialism, or so it seemed to Barnett. If once Socialism got the upper hand in England what would become of him and his horses?

At tea on the lawn they were all full of the same thing. "Old Staunton would rise in his grave if he could hear of it," declared George.

Only Peggy was unconcerned. "As if the silly elections, as if anything, mattered to me."

The Reverend Horace D'Eath was there, the man who ought to have been the country squire, leaning back in his chair, his fingers just touching each other, his fine florid face showing grave concern. "It's the whole trend of things—Church, State, once so indissolubly knitted. But now—— 'Pon my soul, I don't know what we're coming to. All this talk about new divorce laws, for instance; the thin end of the wedge. Once the home life of the country is undermined, tampered with, there is no knowing what will happen. Look at France now! Without religion, without morality, any real national unity is impossible; and that's what the Socialist element in this country would bring us to. Lamentable! It's even, in its own insidious way, invading the Church. The Church! That new appointment the bishop has sanctioned at Kiddlestone, for instance—eh, Hugh? Did you hear about that? A man from one of those new theological colleges, a man who nobody knows anything about, and one of the best livings in the county; all nice people, practically no poor, no chapel. The son of a shopkeeper, would you believe it?—*actually* the son of a shopkeeper! And that fine church and rectory—splendid stabling. One had expected someone of one's own sort, anyhow, at Kiddlestone. There was my old friend Belford, a Balliol man—well, well, it will be a terrible miss for us; there was always something going on at the rectory for the young people in old Harris's time—tennis parties and such-like. It's all so much dead loss to the county. A shop-

keeper's son! 'Pon my soul, I do wonder what things are coming to!"

"A cabinetmaker's son, so Norah Helstone told me," put in Mary.

"Not a carpenter's son, by any chance?" It was Hugh D'Fath who spoke in a detached voice, rolling over one of the terriers with his foot, his head bent.

"Oh, no, not quite so bad as that. A cabinetmaker, quite in a large way, I believe," answered Mary hastily. "But still, what is one to do? There are so many things to consider. One can't call, and Norah says he's married. It will make things so dreadfully awkward."

"Tut, tut!" said D'Eath. "Married! That's bad! The carpenter's son I was thinking of had no wife to complicate matters."

There was a moment's pause. Something in his tone more than his words puzzled them. Then the rector laughed. "Well, I suppose, whatever he is, we've got to swallow him—we 'fellow-toilers in vineyards,' an' all that. But you ladies must please yourselves."

"Of course one does not want to be un-Christian or anything," demurred Mary, with knitted brows.

"My dear, as if you could ever be that," broke in her uncle. Then he drew out his watch and glanced at it. "Dear, dear, I must go. I had planned to write my sermon to-night—anyhow, start it. Frances ordered dinner at seven on purpose. The Kiddingtons are dining with us to-morrow, so there will be no time for anything, and I think Frances has asked the James Stauntons. I suppose you haven't got a bottle of the eighteen-twenty port to spare—eh, Hugh? I've only just got some fresh stuff in, not properly settled. Good enough for a younger son—but Kiddington! You know what Kiddington is about port—a wonderful judge! There's a clear case of heredity for you; his father was just the same, his grandfather, too, from all I hear. Heredity and tradition—that's what all these wretched Socialists want to do away with, I suppose."

"Of course you can have the port. George, will you

see about it? The keys are somewhere on my writing-table."

"Thanks, Hugh, thanks. One can always depend upon you in an emergency, I know that. But you're looking a bit hipped, tired. Nothing wrong, eh?"

"No—no, nothing wrong, thanks."

"That's all right. I was thinking, Mary"—the rector, who had half turned to follow George, bent towards his eldest and favourite niece—"of taking 'Man shall not live by bread alone' for my text next Sunday morning. It seems to me that the time's ripe for a little severity, chastening. Too much pleasure, self-indulgence, eh?"

"Yes, yes, excellent." Mary rose and slipped her arm through that of her uncle. "I think I will walk to the house with you. I wanted to ask you, tell you——"

They moved across the lawn together, Mary talking. Horace courteously bent towards her, listening. Half-way to the house Hugh D'Eath saw his brother turn his head, glance back. So Mary was telling him what Sir Humphrey had said!

"Hugh, dear, would you push that footstool a little nearer? It seems to be growing a trifle damp."

Caroline D'Eath—once more at Dene Royal, since her cook had been selfish and ill-considered enough to leave her for a husband—took up her knitting and gave her brother an encouraging little nod: "Now, tell me, did you and Mary meet *anyone* in London?"

CHAPTER VII

By dinner-time that night it was plain that Mary had "broken the news" to the entire family. Her own eyes were red, no one was quite natural. Suddenly it seemed as though D'Eath were a stranger with whom they had to think before they spoke. Leslie and Dolly were there from the Rectory, strapping, bouncing girls, always "too frightfully busy"; usually taking but little notice of their uncle; brushing him aside, with all uncomprehended things, as "queer." But on this particular evening they could not take their rather prominent, light blue eyes away from him. Dolly kicked him a footstool under the table, Leslie watched him, anticipated his every need; passed him the salt, almost as though she were serving at some sacred ceremony. Each time Tony Helstone launched out upon one of his guffaws he broke off sharply. They all made conversation; cheerful but not gay.

Harold came over for coffee, and Vera, hearing his step in the hall, ran to meet him. There was a great deal of whispering. When he entered the dining-room he took D'Eath's hand: "My dear father," he said; "my very dear father!" Then, "Ah, well, if ever I can do anything. You know what we're for?" He sighed and smiled, consciously hampered by that feeling against "talking shop" so characteristic of the English Church.

"It's a mercy Charles is coming down to-morrow," declared Caroline with a heavy sigh. "He and George will be able to settle everything; take so much off poor dear Hugh's shoulders."

It was as Susie had said, thought D'Eath bitterly; they

would expect him into dying; they had already started it. He went to bed early, because Mary reminded him of what Sir Humphrey had said on the subject of sleep; also because he felt he really could not face Horace, who was coming round to fetch his girls home, and bring the list of Sunday hymns for Gertie, who played the organ when she was at "the dear old home."

Still, there was balm in Gilead, for he lay in peace, reading Samuel Butler, until long after the last of the family had elaborately tip-toed past his room on the way to bed; then rose and sat by his open window, listening to the faint complaining twitter of birds, rendered uneasy by the long twilight, settling themselves to their short sleep amid the trees beneath the window; gazed out upon the lake of mist in the valley, the rounded sweep of the hills against the clear moonlit sky, of that blue which is seen nowhere else save in old Japanese colour prints.

The world was so good and sweet and large. And yet, good Lord, what cages people made for themselves!

He returned to bed, and picking up one after another of the books which filled the shelf at his side, read on and on; here a bit and there a bit. "Browsing," as he called it; a proceeding which his family looked upon with the deepest disapproval. Once having begun a book, Caroline would read it through to the very end, no matter how trashy or dull it might prove to be. "As I've begun it, I must finish it." That was what she said firmly, always remembering the exact number of the page to which she had attained.

Gertie confessed to skimming; but even she did not dart from one book to another; though it might have been allowed to her, for she was literary, and literary people were expected to be odd: had written several little tales, not yet published: thought of starting a novel, but was held up for the want of a plot.

D'Eath never forgot the scandal it occasioned when they found him reading the Book of Job in the garden one morning, after breakfast, too.

True, Caroline read "her chapter" after breakfast, but she decorously went to her own room to do so.

"Father! Well, I'm blessed!" It was Vera who discovered him, who instantly gave tongue, attracting attention to his vagaries. "Reading the Bible, in the garden, in the middle of the morning! If that doesn't beat everything!" Mary had moved towards them with her little jar of salt and water, her gardening gloves—she had been picking slugs off the young chrysanthemums—and joined in with the remark that on her way to bed, only the night before, going into the study to ask her father to be sure and put out the lamp, she had noticed that he was deep in a French novel—so deep that he did not seem even to notice her. "The Revolt of something, by a Frenchman named France; I know I noticed it particularly, because it seemed so odd for a Frenchman to be called France."

On this particular night D'Eath browsed until after one o'clock and slept late; was awakened by hearing James, who valeted him, moving about the room with unwonted softness.

A fragrant smell of coffee and fried sole permeated the air. "What in the world——" he began; upon which James looped back the last curtain, and moved over to his master's side. "Miss Mary thought, as you weren't very well, with the journey and all, it would be best for you to have your breakfast in bed this morning, sir." With his large red hands, anxious and conscientious, the man arranged the articles on the tray, so D'Eath might help himself the more easily. "I hope, sir, that I've not forgotten anything." There was a discreet knock at the door, and he moved to open it; came back with a little glass jar of marmalade upon a silver tray.

"One of the housemaids with the marmalade, sir. Miss Mary noticed that it had not gone up. I don't know how I came to forget it; I am sure I hope that you'll excuse me, sir."

He moved humbly towards the door, and then half turned. "I do trust, sir, that you will feel a little better to-day."

So it had begun; he was already cast for the imprisoned role of an invalid doddering to the grave.

There was James—James!—whom he had overheard only the day before bragging to one of the grooms, cleaning a bit against the stable door.

"Cleared thirty bob I did over the sweepstake as we had in the hall; took that new little housemaid—what do you call her?—Violet, into Cottingham, high tea and something with it. Lord, what a time we had!" The groom had muttered some reply amidst his hissing, then James had laughed. "Shy? Not she! Catch 'em an' kiss 'em an' they'll eat out o' the hand, from the highest to the lowest. That's what I says, an' I've proved it, too. My word, there's things I could tell you, an' not only about our class neither!"

That was the real James: as different as anything could well be from the stuffed dummy who hung his great shoulders over his master's breakfast tray. Was he to go on all his life—the fraction of life which still remained to him—wrapped in cotton-wool, ministered to by these mealy-mouthed sycophants?

He was flinging his bedclothes aside preparatory to getting up, thinking of a cold bath, when Mary knocked at the door, entered with a little glass in her hand. "Your drops, father. I thought that I had better see to them myself. You know, darling, you really are so naughty about taking your medicine."

The days which followed were amongst the most miserable that Hugh D'Eath ever remembered. It was certain that he must go to Nauheim; Cook had been written to. And yet it was difficult to completely settle anything. It seemed impossible for Mary to accompany him, because there was Peggy to be considered. If Peggy were laid up at Dene Royal, and Mary were not at hand to keep order, there would be sure to be difficulties with the servants; there always was with a nurse in the house. Vera did not want to go because of young Helstone and her trousseau—well, there, Mary was needed to help with that also. Caroline

had never been abroad, even to Paris. And Gertie could not go without Fenton, and Fenton was frightened of the sea.

There was a suggestion of Dolly and Leslie, but then someone would have to go to look after them. "What with German officers and all, and Hugh never seeing anything going on under his very nose." Of course there was Cousin Edith, but Edith would not go anywhere without her dog; and Isabel Ingram, who was always ready to go anywhere so long as her expenses were paid, was laid up with shingles.

The subject was discussed in all its aspects. Of course there was the possibility of a hired trained nurse, but here D'Eath himself put down his foot.

"If only you had any suggestion to make yourself, dear father," said Mary at last in despair, though she would not listen to her father's reiterated assurance that he was quite well enough to go alone.

"One does not know what might happen," that was what Mary said.

No, one did not know what might happen, they all felt that. To all this worry and discussion over the question as to who should accompany him to Nauheim—which made D'Eath feel ashamed of his very existence—was added the graver question of "affairs."

George was leaving the diplomatic service because he could no longer afford it. It seemed to D'Eath that there never could be any family who spent more money and got less fun out of it. George had thought of taking a little place and breeding hunters. But then what was the good of doing that, putting money into a house when no one knew what might happen? When they said this sort of thing it seemed to Hugh D'Eath as though his family had got their own toes in between his heel and his shoe, were gradually working it off.

Old Colonel Helstone came over to discuss settlements. "Of course for the present it's all right; you've been very generous, D'Eath, munificently generous. But there's

the future to think of, and these new death duties are the very devil; we all realise that, even the strongest of us."

It seemed to D'Eath—from all that was intimated, the logical outcome of what was said—that he put his family in an equally difficult position whether he lived or died. Irene wrote to him quite frankly: "You mustn't think me heartless, but I do hope that I shall be absolutely independent, free to live my own life; no guardians, or any of that nonsense, no depending upon George, who, as you know, I never could stand——"

Roger Colburn came over from Thorns. He was one of his late sister's executors, and had no opinion at all of his brother-in-law. "A decent fellow, but a regular muddler; knows nothing whatever about business.

"There's that chap Cherry, to whom your father trusts everything. I don't believe half the tenants are paying anything like a proper rent," he said to George, walking up and down the terrace smoking after luncheon, thinking what a mercy it was that George had his head screwed on the right way. One of old Colburn's legs was a little shorter than the other, and this inclined him to veer to the left, a tendency which he counteracted by a sudden swing of the other leg at every three or four steps. D'Eath, sitting by the open window of the study, could hear his voice going on and on—a dogmatic, boring voice. Mrs. Colburn was in the drawing-room with Mary, and he knew that they were all talking about him.

George went up to London, stayed the night. Charles, who had been home once and rejoined his regiment, now appeared again. D'Eath had an idea that he did so under protest. In some ways—if only he had not been so anxious to seem perfectly unmoved and impartial—Charles was a good fellow. There was some tremendous discussion going on: talk which dropped or changed its tenor directly D'Eath entered the room. Once he heard Charles say: "Well, it seems to me like taking a rotten advantage; why can't you leave the poor old chap alone?"

There were more meetings between Horace D'Eath and Roger Colburn, between the three sons; conclaves in which the entire family, apart from the head of it, were involved.

Once coming in upon them, assembled in the drawing-room one afternoon, realising the sudden cessation of a heated argument, D'Eath lost his temper. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "am I a tame idiot, that you should all stop talking when I come into a room? Out with it now. What do you want, what are you doing?" He spoke violently, utterly unlike himself.

For a moment he had an impression of their faces, hung in space, as it were; then Mary rose from her seat, crossed the room and laid one hand on his arm. "Father, dear father, now what did Sir Humphrey say about not exciting yourself over things?"

"I don't care what he said, the old fool! But I can't stand any more of this. I tell you I can't stand it!" He stared round, defiant, trembling, while they stared back.

"Well, I must say, Hugh, dear, I *am* surprised!" Caroline rolled up her knitting, stabbed her needles into it. It was as though she said, "Well, if this isn't the end of everything!" "Of course in your state of health we are willing to make every possible allowance. But still I do think you might realise that we, the dear children, Horace and I, Mr. Colburn"—she never by any chance included Gertie in anything which she regarded as calling for a display of common sense—"are trying our very best to save you all possible worry, considering you in every way. What else should we be here for now, in the Season?"

"I'm sure it's very disagreeable for all of us," put in Gertie. "No one likes illness, and if only people would cultivate the habit of subduing the mind to the body there would be an end of it, once and for all." She spoke with decision, for she was an ardent Christian Scientist, so long as she herself was in good health.

There was a moment's pause. The room, the people in

it, seemed to swim before Hugh D'Eath's eyes; he had a feeling as if nothing, nobody, was quite real. He happened to be wearing a dark blue suit, and the legs of his trousers were covered with little bits of fluff—because when he had sat down to rest for a while after lunch Mary had insisted upon covering his knees with a light fleecy shawl—and the very knowledge that he looked untidy helped to unnerve him.

Charles walked over to the window whistling softly to himself, while George crossed his legs and began sharpening a pencil; Mary picked up her drawn thread work, pulled it out, turned it over, flattening it upon her knees with large white hands, which trembled a little.

"Well?" said D'Eath. No one could ask him to sit down in his own house, particularly now, with the remembrance of what they had just been saying, thinking—though at any other time Mary would have reminded him that he had been warned against overfatigue. And so he stood, as awkwardly as a naturally graceful man could, almost in the middle of the room, looking as though he were on his trial—defendant or plaintiff, it would have been difficult to say which.

Charles half turned. "Look here, father, there is something——" He paused, then swung round towards his elder brother. "This is your business, George; you started it. Why can't you tell him straight out—have it done with one way or another?" Charles's long, smooth face was red; for the moment he had a look of Susie—Susie as she might be if she got "set."

"Don't you think, considering—well, considering my profession, if I were to say a few words——?" began Harold deprecatingly.

"Heavens above! you're not going to read the funeral service over me before I'm dead?" flashed out D'Eath.

"My dear father!"

"My dear Hugh!"

It was like a Greek chorus: the inevitability of it.

"Well, father, it's a damned awkward thing to have

to say; but as you seem to be in the sort of mood to resent everything we do—of course, we know that you're frightfully seedy and all that—perhaps it's best to have the whole thing out at once." George rose as he spoke and, walking over to the mantelshelf, stood leaning one arm upon it. Already, or so it seemed to D'Eath, there was the premonition of a curve in his tan waistcoat. And this was the same creature that he remembered—red, wrinkled, screaming, with tiny fists screwed into its eyes. These—these mature men and women—were his own children. "It appears," went on George, rather more pompously in that he was nervous, "there are certain things that it's best to have out, don't you know."

"Really," put in Mary brightly, "all this talk of going abroad, dear father, all this change—well, it's like moving house, you do find things—well, you find things perhaps not quite as they should be."

"I wouldn't have said anything—at least, not yet," went on George. "But to a certain extent, don't you know, my hand's been forced." He stared, rather sourly, at Charles as he spoke.

"No special premium on chairs, is there?" remarked Charles, and glanced at his father. It was kindly meant, delicate for Charles; but a sort of perverse humour had come over D'Eath, who realised that he made them all uneasy by standing.

"The fact is, father," continued George, "I've been about the place a good deal more than usual lately. I suppose when a man's married, got others to think of, he naturally takes a greater interest in a property that—a property—hum——" For a moment he paused, reddening, then began again: "Anyhow, the sober fact is that things are not going on quite as they ought to do; haven't been for some time, for the matter of that. Toms has got the woods into a terrible state; they must have wanted thinning for years. Of course, I know that this sort of thing bores you frightfully, that you don't care for the country, but still——"

"I've lived here all my life."

"Yes, but that—you must forgive my saying so—that's rather a different thing, isn't it?" Suddenly George was at his ease again, patronising. D'Eath realised that, after all, he might not have been such a fool in his profession as he seemed; anyhow, when he cornered an opponent he knew how to hold him down.

"There's next to no game. Dawkins tells me the poaching has got beyond words since you refuse to convict that fellow Grimes."

"Grimes! That poor devil! He was out of work, had no end of children—and one pheasant! What would I have done with it? Sent it to some friend of my own with too much to eat already!"

"All the same, that's no excuse for rank dishonesty —poaching! Why, he wasn't even one of your tenants, was he? I know how it put Kennington's back up when the man got off. Deuced hard luck when you remember that he spends hundreds a year on his preserves. And it's not only that. The tenants are taking every bit they can out of the land, putting nothing in it, selling hay and straw unchecked. Buildings are literally dropping to pieces. God only knows what Cherry has done with all the money that's supposed to have been spent upon them; frittered it away, or worse!"

"How do you know what's supposed to have been spent?"

"Well, Brown and Cleaver gave me a hint, told me a certain amount."

"They had no right to tell you anything." D'Eath's voice was icy, his blue eyes steady on his son's face. He moved a step or two farther into the room, and rested one hand on the back of a chair. Suddenly it seemed certain that his eldest son was the defendant, caught in that most dastardly of all crimes—spying. How continually he had given in to them in every way. But still there was a limit, and his gorge rose at the thought of his affairs being pried into, fingered over: his oldest

most tried friends and dependants—Toms, Cherry—condemned.

"After all, you must remember, father, I am the eldest son. Things have got to be straightened out someway or other; there'll be no end to the trouble if—if anything should happen. It seems to me natural enough that I should want to see the men who, after all, will be my own lawyers; explain to them a little what we—well, what we have reason to fear, what the specialist——"

"Fear? Hope, you mean!"

"Father, dear father, why will you talk like that?" interposed Mary. "You must know that our one idea is to make things as easy as possible for you."

"Cherry—Cherry, too!" It was as though D'Eath brushed her aside. "Cherry! Why, we were at school together, when he was a big boy, I a little one! Cherry!"

"I know, we all know, my dear Hugh," put in Horace soothingly, "Cherry's a fine fellow, a very fine fellow, a good specimen of his class. We all have—well, almost an affection for Cherry. But still it does not alter the fact that we're afraid he's a bit of a muddler; takes too much upon himself."

"It's all confoundedly awkward," put in Roger Colburn. He had got up from his seat and was moving to and fro, stumping sideways with his crab-like movement. "'Pon my soul there's no one hates interfering with another man's affairs more than I do. But don't you see, it's not only Dene Royal, there's Suttons to be considered." Suttons was the small estate which had belonged to D'Eath's wife, was left in trust for her daughters, with Horace D'Eath and her brother as joint executors. "The man you've got in there is hopeless; letting the whole place go to rack and ruin. I could have told you that the first day I saw him out hunting; can't ride for nuts. My God, what a seat! And then look at his boots—a regular counter-jumper!"

"Well, Suttons and Dene Royal and myself all wrong. 'What now, to follow?' as the waiters say." Hugh D'Eath moved across to the window-seat and sat down, staring out at the dappled light and shade, the shaven lawns, with never a fallen leaf, the orderly flower-beds, blazing with colour. A sense of immense weariness and dissatisfaction swept over him. He would go on like this day after day for a few more months; then he, too, would be turfed over. So little life left, and yet nothing happening to justify even that little. He realised now when people begin to get really old; it is when there are no possibilities left to them.

Even Nauheim would be preferable to this; anyhow he would be free from his family's preoccupation with "the funeral baked meats."

"Don't you think it would be better to speak quite frankly; tell me what you expect me to do?"

The word "expect" sounded awkward; but still D'Eath spoke with a certain reasonableness which gave them hope. One could do anything with people if only they would be reasonable.

Then it all came out, for George began with a halting reference to old Sir Philip Harding, and in a moment D'Eath had caught the gist of what was required of him. Philip Harding had divided his estate—country houses, which he hated, involving a country life, which bored him, and certain other properties, fishing lodge in Ireland, mansion in Cavendish Square—between his children some years earlier; reserving a fair-sized regular income for himself, stipulating that he was to be allowed to go his own way, not bothered about anything. At this time everyone had said that old Harding was in his dotage; D'Eath himself remembered having quoted "King Lear." But now, quite suddenly, it seemed as though Harding were beside him, with that scent of fine cigars, that odd laugh, so like a bark, that they were fellow cronies. Harding was nudging him in the ribs, infecting him with his own idea, his own point of view. He remembered how the old man had said to him once, years

before: "We start building our own mausoleums from the time we marry; heaping up obligations, ties; our families sit on our chests, keep us down. They and all the other things that everyone expects of us. By God, D'Eath, there's no tyranny in the world like the tyranny of a position; above all if it be in the country. You must lose your character or your money, or you're done for."

They said that old Harding had a gay little mistress in town; there was no end of what they said. Certainly if he had felt like Lear he had not looked it on the few occasions D'Eath met him in Piccadilly, with his immaculate, curly top hat at a light-hearted angle. Lady Harding had been dead for years; but she had always seemed old, with none of the interest of the really antique; like a piece of mid-Victorian furniture.

So this was what they wanted of him, was it? An immense sense of lightheartedness came over Hugh D'Eath at the thought. But he would not help them; it amused him to hear them edge round and round the subject; to catch the repetition of that phrase, "If anything should happen"; the insistence upon saving him trouble; the dislike he had always shown for the numberless petty duties of a country squire. There was even some word of the family having "a stake in the country," which he took to mean George standing for Parliament; filling old Staunton's seat. They never once mentioned the word "death-duties"; though that, like the inner life of a cocoon, was the true reason for all this winding.

Still D'Eath would give them no help. It seemed as though his momentary reasonableness was gone, for he simply stood silent, smiling in a fashion which drove his brother Horace to remark, later on, walking home across the park with his curate, that he really thought poor Hugh's illness was affecting his brain. They called him "dear Hugh" now; when he was dead they would call him "poor dear Hugh." He knew that—even Horace, who believed in the glories of an everlasting life.

"It struck me that he had acquired a very beautiful

expression, a spiritual expression," remarked Harold; upon which his uncle glanced at him sideways, shooting out his lips, showing that contempt with which even the Church regards an effeminate young man. It seemed to Horace D'Eath—robust, full-blooded, well-fed, prosperous, father of six children, judge of a good horse, good wine, a fine woman—that all this teetotal, ritualistic, bobbing business was playing the very deuce with the Church of England.

"Ah, well, the ways of the Lord are past finding out," he remarked comfortably. "To think that your poor father is only eighteen months older than I am; but no stamina; absolutely no stamina."

"I feel very strongly that someone ought to speak a few words to him, prepare him. And yet it's so awkward to say anything."

"Quite so, quite so." There was a moment's pause. The rector was thinking, puffing out his lips, drawing them in again. "Quite so, quite so." If the curate had a distaste for mentioning religion to any save the working classes his rector more than shared it; while apart from this it seemed a sort of impertinence in one's own nephew. He moved in a zig-zag fashion, cutting at the thistles with his spud; for that was a way he had of signifying that his brother Hugh was hopeless as a landowner; of doing his best for Dene Royal, the family. There was something relentless in the sharp jerk he gave to the stem of an offending weed, the measured pace with which he would turn aside from his path, a large, smooth blot of black upon the green landscape. It would have taken three ordinary curates to make such a man.

"I was wondering, Harold," he began, then diverged again—"it's no good unless you get 'em before they begin to seed; wouldn't you think, now, that Cherry would see to a thing like this, with all the idle old men there are about the place?—how much there is left of that old brown sherry your grandfather laid down; whether George would

do a deal with me. He hates sherry; I've heard him say so time after time, and it's far too good to be wasted on the girls."

"We none of us touch sherry," remarked Harold sententiously, with that air of making a matter of principle of all he said; glass-window attitudinising, with strange gestures of the hands, even over eating an egg.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSIE was not expected home during the first part of her summer holidays, was going to the sea with some friends. "It will brace her up," that was what Mary said. "Besides, it would not be very nice to have a young girl about the house with Peggy and all."

Perhaps it was this which did more than anything else to decide D'Eath definitely in favour of Nauheim. If there could be anything in favour of anything else, when life looked like a dark street—with houses on either side, all tall and blind, all exactly alike, terminating in a cul-de-sac and a dustbin. In the old days, when the world was new, full of adventure, it might have been Charon and his skiff; but Hugh D'Eath visualised it as ending—that circumscribed street of life—with the dustman and his cart: a blear-eyed man; a broken-kneed, rusty black horse.

Young Brown, of "Cleaver, Brown & Son," came down to see him. There were more family conclaves. Gradually, with much delicacy, the enwrappings were unwound from the cocoon, and that hidden skeleton of death dues—losing nothing from the reflection that its size and terror were alike due to the possession of a remarkably large income, very considerable landed property—revealed naked in the hand of Brown—Son—so smooth-faced, so very red about the gills, that he looked as though he had been scalded instead of shaved, making up in aloof lucidity for what he lacked in years. It was as though he said: "I had nothing to do with the institution of death, but as it is a concrete fact that people do die, legal men like myself are an act of God."

Even after D'Eath had consented, or as good as con-

sented, to follow old Harding's example, there was a tremendous amount of detail to be arranged. It seemed that outlying scraps of property, small sums invested in all sorts of strange foreign ventures—Argentine, Chinese, Turkish, Russian, Balkan, for though the average Englishman distrusts every race but his own he seems to feel most happy with his money well out of England—stray legacies which had dropped in from those numerous relations who do leave money to rich people, kept on cropping up and putting them all out. But gradually, with the help of young Mr. Brown and his inhuman competence, with valuers and auditors, matters straightened themselves, and a document was drawn up passing on the main bulk of the property, Dene Royal and all the outlying farms, the greater part of the money, as a gift to George; Little Laishens, a smaller place over the other side of The Hill, and seventy thousand pounds to Charles; a very comfortable income to Harold—quite sufficient to show that he had no desire to make any parade of the religion of poverty—and a substantial share to the three girls, under the management of George, Roger Colburn, and Horace D'Eath, along with immediate possession of Suttons, if so be that they desired to live there, if not the income accruing therefrom; while along with all this were smaller gifts—what might have been legacies—to every relation and dependant.

It seemed, indeed, that nobody had been forgotten. They were all very fairly, nay, generously treated. The income which D'Eath reserved for himself was a small one from the one obscure investment which he had ever made altogether upon his own initiative; while, if Sir Humphrey had been right, without doubt this also would very shortly join the common pool.

But no sooner was the document drawn up, with the full sanction of everyone concerned, than they began to see faults in it. From the moment that young Brown left Dene Royal with the rough draft a deep depression and sense of grievance beyond all words hung over them all, for there is nothing more aggravating than to get what you want and

then find it is not all you thought. George felt that he was likely to be hampered at every turn by the amount of money which his younger brothers and sisters would take away from the place. "As to making settlements on Mary for Mary's children," said Peggy, "as if that isn't absolutely tommy-rot!"

This was the point she fixed on. But they all fixed on something. Irene was furious because George had been given a certain amount of authority over her despite her express wishes, because her money was tied up for the children which she declared she would never have. Vera did not see why Suttons should not be sold and the proceeds divided, as it was not likely that she could ever live there. Charles said that Little Laishens had needed a new sanitary installation for years, and it seemed jolly hard luck to expect that to come out of his pockets; besides, it was miles from all the best meets, and there was George who did not really care for hunting in the very middle of the best part of the county. During the old days Charles had saved up all his leave for the winter, brought his hunters to Dene Royal, paid nothing for forage or attendance; in this he stood to lose. He was not very quick, did not grasp the fact that his increased income would more than make up for this. It would give him "the deuce of a lot of trouble," that was as far as he saw, and George had much better have left things as they were; it was George who had started the whole thing. As to Mary, she hated Suttons; and though it was nice to have Peggy as a visitor at Dene Royal, fuss round her and patronise her, she did not care for the idea of giving up her place as mistress of the house, the maids who all belonged to the Girls' Friendly Society, to a sister-in-law who never went to church, had no idea of looking after the villagers, managing the parish nurse.

They had always had just as much money as ever they needed from their father, and no trouble about it; the sense of a settled income galled and half frightened them.

As for the rest of the family, Hugh D'Eath had always been hopelessly impractical about money, but there are

advantages accruing to a man who thoroughly realises that "to lend" is, with relations, merely a polite euphonism for "to give"—arranged to save people's feelings, like "not at home"—who never reminds, apparently never remembers.

They said very little. But if one member of the family were alone in a room he, or she, made some excuse for leaving it when any other single member entered. They were happier in the herd, or alone; each had a particular grievance and was frightened of the encroachment of another's grievance. The house began to have a stripped look, it seemed to D'Eath as though all small personal possessions were being surreptitiously removed.

Day after day, at tea, after dinner in the evenings he sat in his great winged chair gleefully cognisant of his family's sense of discomfort. How often, for the first time in the lives of any one of them did he hear the complaint: "Oh, I shan't be able to afford that *now,*" or, "My dear, you mustn't expect me to live in that sort of style."

One day he came across Mary in the long south border, busy with a trowel and little fork; the ground was hard with the long drought, and she was very hot. "Why don't you let one of the men do that, my dear?" he said kindly; and then, noticing that the back of his eldest daughter's neck crimsoned, that she had a box beside her full of small, brown, earthy objects, realised she was moving her bulbs, though it was ten to one they would not survive such treatment at that time of year.

On another occasion he encountered Mrs. St. John in the upper corridor, almost running with her short, quick steps, the forward curve of a stout person in a hurry. She was going so fast round a corner that they collided, while one corner of her skirt, which she held gathered up in her hand, dropped, and a miscellaneous collection of objects rolled to the floor and along the passage. D'Eath stooped to help pick them up, almost helpless with laughter, for the expression of Gertie's face—round as a globefish, the raised eyebrows, the open mouth—had been beyond words. There was broken china, a delicate cup with the handle gone, a saucer

in fragments, the miniature of Great Uncle General Sir John D'Eath, a small silver ship, a scent bottle with a gold stopper which had once belonged to Queen Caroline, a Georgian sugar sifter, and numerous other trifles.

"They're mine!" cried Gertie; and then pulled herself together with a little aggrieved laugh. "My dear Hugh, what a fright you gave me! I do wish you wouldn't *creep* about like that. I was just collecting a few odds and ends that dear mother gave me. I always left them for you, but I knew that Peggy wouldn't care for them, I never met anyone so completely without any sentiment or taste for associations. Really, it does seem rather dreadful"—she had been going to say "that she should come to be mistress here"—but suddenly, spying some small silver object which had rolled away up the corridor, she pounced and left her sentence unfinished.

After all there was some slight flaw in the draft, and young Brown was obliged to journey down to Dene Royal to straighten it out.

When he came again it was all complete and ready to be signed.

This rearrangement had, however, taken more time than they calculated upon; for by then it was the twentieth of July, and everything was arranged for D'Eath to go to Nauheim on the twenty-second after one night in town. Mary was accompanying him. They had beaten the close covers of relations in vain search for someone else, but without success. To D'Eath's continued plea that he should be allowed to go alone, there was that one unanswerable objection:—"What would people say if we let you go away alone, ill as you are?"

That "people" was paralysing; it was worse than God. For the unbelieving might say, "God won't notice," the believing "God will understand"; but neither of these sophisms was of any use in regard to "people."

Perhaps the feelings of the D'Eath family were more complicated than they realised. They were bound to regard their father as an almost hopeless case in order to justify

the partition of his worldly goods; and if he was really as ill as all that, how was it possible for them to allow him to travel alone?

Still no one excepting Mary could be found willing to tread the path of duty. Irene was out of the question, for she was working for an exam.; she was always working for exams. She had no idea of taking up any special profession when she had passed them; though she spoke of finishing off with a course of domestic economy, and then "having a slack."

Mary did not want to go to Germany, though she was upheld by a sense of martyrdom, the oft-uttered reflection that "of course, dear father knows he can always depend upon me." She would probably miss Vera's wedding, which was fixed for the end of August, because all sorts of things might happen in Nauheim; she would also miss the arrival of George's baby. Vera was relieved, because she wanted just "to be married," and Mary was set on "a wedding." Peggy was relieved because Mary's attitude, which seemed to regard the expected infant as altogether D'Eath, was hard to bear. "I'd jolly well like to know where George's baby would be if it wasn't for me?" she asked. "That old Mary, it would serve her right to have triplets of her own; not that she's got any figure to lose."

Young Brown arrived at Dene Royal at five o'clock, and had tea in the garden. The whole party was assembled together. Mary with the coat of her grey travelling suit on her knee, was taking out the weights at the corners and replacing them with sovereigns stitched into the lining, because she had been told that one was always perfectly safe abroad so long as one had a piece of English gold, and never drank the water. Peggy was there in a pretty, loose muslin gown with painted flowers upon it; very—though perhaps a little hectically—cheerful.

Horace D'Eath already made one of the party; and just as tea was finished Roger Colburn rode up the drive, very stiff, on a hog-maned cob, his game leg stuck out a trifle,

the other close to his mount's side. A hard, grey man, in a grey cord suit on a grey cob.

He would not have any tea, but asked for a whisky and soda, and went off with George to the dining-room, while young Mr. Brown retired in search of his papers. They were all to meet in the study.

Mary slipped her arm into her father's; he was very ill, and she felt very responsible and capable, which pleased her. Her luggage was already packed, strapped, and labelled, and Collins had filled her flask. "You mustn't be nervous, father," she said, and patted his arm. "You mustn't let yourself be fussed. Just leave everything to me and James." James was going with them to Nauheim.

They were moving towards the house, Horace in front of them, taking a zig-zag path over the lawn, stubbing up his brother's plantains with some new instrument which he had just acquired, when Peggy, whom they had left with a book in her long chair, called to Mary.

"Mary, Mary!" It was an oddly sharp cry, showing entreaty, fear, pain, a quite sudden desire for Mary's help, companionship. When they returned they saw that Peggy's face had gone a greenish white; her always prominent brown eyes were bolting.

"Go on, father, don't wait for me," said Mary, and turned back to her sister-in-law's side. A moment or so later she passed him. Horace was at his side by now, talking of the hay, only just in despite the weeks of perfect weather. It seemed as though it were a matter of religion with all of them never to leave him alone; to hand him on from one to another.

Mary almost ran to the house, and a moment later reappeared with George. The rector puffed out his cheeks. "Peggy not well? Dear, dear! I hope—— But you must not allow yourself to be agitated, Hugh, my dear fellow; you must consider your own health. We old married men, we know. Nature—eh, what?"

Hugh D'Eath and his brother turned into the study; the dining-room door was open, and a scent of whisky

wafted through it, overcoming the perfume of mignonette, which Mary had arranged in a glass vase upon the writing-table; though she had said that really it did not seem much good "doing the flowers and things," for there would be nobody to bother about them when she was gone.

In another moment Roger Colburn joined them, and, standing by the open window, the three men saw George help his wife back to the house. A little later a groom, on horseback, appeared and disappeared at a gallop upon the one curve of drive which was visible.

"Eh, yes, yes!" The Reverend Horace and old Colburn glanced at each other and nodded; their faces had assumed a look of unctuous triumph, the triumph of the conquering sex.

There was a fresh whiff of whisky from the open door of the dining-room; the gurgle of a syphon. Then came the shrill voice of Peggy's French maid, crossing the hall, moving towards the dining-room. At the same moment old Nanny appeared on the threshold of the study. "Master George, please, sir?"

She addressed her master, but her slow, contemptuous gaze moved from him to the other two men, then back again. Roger Colburn had eight children, the rector six; there was the master with seven. Her glance condemned them, yet condoned because they were only men; could not help themselves. They saw her nostrils twitch, and she glanced towards the dining-room door. "Master George, you're wanted," she said. And then, "Master George!" She did not move to fetch him, called him as she had done in far-away days, certain of obedience, for she had a firm hand with D'Eath's children.

From the inner room came, "Ah, monsieur! Mon Dieu, la pauvre madame! Madame demande—" The words ran out into a stream of ejaculations and entreaty that monsieur would make haste; come to madame. But it was evident that they were disregarded, for the next moment George appeared at the study door, with a glass in one hand.

Nanny fixed him; her fresh-coloured and usually bene-

volent face was hard and keen, her wide mouth folded tight as though she were trying to keep back all that she knew of life and death.

"You're wanted, Master George," she said, and turned, then stood aside to allow him to pass through the door before her.

"Why, what the devil can I do?" broke out the young man violently. His hair was a trifle ruffled as Hugh had never seen it since his school days, and this alone gave him a strange—what Susie might call "a disintegrated" air. There was something at once frightened and defiant in his stare; it was as though he might have said to Nanny, as he so often had said, trembling beneath her steady eye, "It wasn't me!" But as it was he said nothing, put down his glass on the nearest table, and left the room, after one sheepish glance at the three elder men, who knew all about it.

CHAPTER IX

THERE was no question of signing the deed of gift that evening, and young Mr. Brown spent his time playing billiards with Charles.

The drawing-room was deserted save for Aunt Caroline. Every now and then Mrs. St. John came running in, hesitated, as though trying to remember what she was there for, why she was so busy, and then departed hurriedly, with a cushion or book for which she had no use whatever; merely because she felt her sister's eye upon her, did not wish to appear aimless. It really seemed very heartless of Caroline to go on with her knitting at such a time; though, after all, if Peggy had "thought," as she ought to have thought before her child came, she would not be suffering now.

Every half-hour by the clock Caroline laid down her knitting and sailed majestically up to what she called "the room"—not "sick-room," because dear Peggy's state was due to nature—to inquire. She held her majestic head high, her back erect. It was as though she would cry "Ha, ha!" —smelling the battle from afar off.

Towards twelve o'clock George came into the study—where his father sat before a wood fire which he had lighted for himself—his brown boots drenched with dew. For the doctor had advised the young man to go for a walk, and he had been across the park, up the hill by Mars Lane and back by Laishens.

All the way home he had hurried; driven, from the moment he turned, by the thought of what might have happened during his absence. He was no longer able to maintain that detachment from Peggy which he regarded as "the

thing," even in his secret thoughts. It seemed as though her suffering, which she had taken no pains to hide, pricked out a sweat of agony upon his own brow. Surely it must be all safely over by now? Unless—the very thought of the alternative drove him into a run.

And yet when he reached the house he was told that there was no change, that the whole infernal thing was still going on; stood awhile outside Peggy's door, which had been his door also, listening to her moans, without daring to go in—for by now she was too weak to demand his presence with that sort of fierce malice which she had displayed at the beginning—then moved slowly downstairs and stood before the study fire, warming his hands, shivering a little like a fine hound.

His eyes were bloodshot and furtive as he glanced sideways at his father, wondering if he had been through anything like this when he, George, was born; resentful because he felt that this elderly man was broken to the whole thing, might despise him for the emotion which he could not entirely hide; unreasonably angry, in a way he had never been before, with everything and everybody; most angry because of the inexplicable and unfamiliar feeling of being in the wrong; having everything and everybody against him.

D'Eath realised this. For the first time since George was a tiny child—for he had so soon grown self-possessed, self-sufficient—it seemed that he could feel for his son, with that sort of feeling which penetrated beneath the outer crust of education and conceit.

"I know it's perfectly damnable," he said, "and the worst of it is that one never really gets used to it, never, never." It was no wonder that he spoke with feeling. Clara D'Eath had been a strong woman. She must have suffered in her body when her seven children were born, suffered horribly, as all women do at such times. But she had what the doctors and nurses call "a good time," was phlegmatic by nature. It was her husband's nerves which had been torn to ribbons seven times in succession; he

who had gone through agonies of self-reproach and terror: she who always wished to have children, he who would have done almost anything to avoid it—the pretentious mystery, the fuss, the indecent pain, the confusion, the horrible details; the shameful, red-faced, protesting atom which was the outcome of it all.

The doctor came in rubbing his hands. "A fire! Well, well, this is a pleasant sight!" He stretched out his hands to the blaze as he spoke. "Did you see the evening paper? Upon my soul things seem to be getting into a pretty serious state in Ireland."

George had sunk into a chair, slouching in a way he seldom did, his hands in his pockets, his legs stuck out straight in front of him. He glanced at the urbane, confident man—who after all knew more about his wife than he did—with dislike and contempt. "Lord!" he thought, "who would be a doctor?"—then jerked out hoarsely, "How is she?"

"Your wife? Oh, capital, capital! A little slow perhaps, but perfectly normal; maintaining her strength most wonderfully."

"Oh!" George's sidelong glance was almost savage. At that moment he could have borne it better had he heard that Peggy was in immediate danger. "Making me look like a fool!" that was what he thought. After all, if the case was so simple as this ass made it out to be, surely the whole thing should be over by now.

"I'm inclined to think that if we could once get someone with a really firm hand," went on the doctor, returning to Ireland, as people do when they are tired, "that matters might be straightened out. Of course, Birrell's no match for——"

He broke off, as from far away in the silent depths of this tranquil and well-ordered house, there came the sound of a shrill, strangely wild, and primitive cry.

Perhaps he was more attentive than he had seemed, for he heard it in a moment, and was out of the door. They could hear him running upstairs as a second

cry, louder than the first, came cutting the air towards them.

"Good God!" exclaimed George violently; got up from his chair and turned towards the fire, his elbows on the mantelpiece, his head down upon them, his hands pressed to either side of his head; though whether he was in pain or trying to shut out any fresh sound it would have been difficult to say.

D'Eath sat silent without stirring, and in some dull way George was grateful to him for this. The very next day, he thought, he would make young Brown tear up that deed of gift. It did not matter a damn what the others chose to say; after all, this old fellow was near to him, nearer than he had ever thought, must have had a devil of a time in his day.

The two men had remained thus for close on half an hour, D'Eath sitting motionless in his chair, George with his head between his hands, standing before the greying fire, when there was the sound of feet pattering down the stairs, and Gertie St. John ran into the room. She was so excited that she could not speak, but stood panting with her hand dramatically pressed to her heart, while her brother and nephew stared at her; George with an oddly ravaged face, his hair at the back of his head where it had lolled against the chair, erect in that crest which he had battled against when he was a boy; overcome, once for all, as he thought, at the age of nineteen.

"My darling Georgie, it's a son!" broke out Gertie at last. "A son—such a fine little chap! A regular D'Eath!"

"Oh, well," said George, and passed a careful hand down the back of his head, smoothing himself with one touch, with a sort of drooping of the eyelids, back into his old smooth self. "And now I suppose I may be permitted to see my wife," he added, and moved out of the room, without a glance at his father; thinking that, after all, there would be plenty of time to have

the deed signed next morning before starting for the train.

A son! Aunt Gertie had said a son! All the more reason that things should be got into some sort of order.

In his man's way he imagined everything to be settled because he himself felt settled and at ease.

CHAPTER X

THAT evening, when the birth of a son had been announced to George D'Eath, after he had smiled approval upon Peggy, and had a few words with the doctor, it seemed certain that life would take up its normal course again; enriched and solidified by the complete possession of Dene Royal, which he would manage as it had never been managed before. There was no end to his plans, for, like all Colburns, he had a passion for detail.

But next morning everything was again changed. From having got over her actual confinement quite nicely, Peggy dropped into a state of grave weakness. "We're not altogether out of the wood yet," said the doctor, after having declared that there never was any wood. When George awoke, heard the news, as he did while shaving, he was disturbed, upset; and yet by no means in that state to which he had fallen the night before. Perhaps, after all, it had been the child who was his concern; and even more than the child, the heir, "my son."

In general events at Dene Royal moved slowly. But on this particular morning decisions were taken in a flash, as it were.

For weeks and weeks the whole family had discussed the question as to who should go to Germany with D'Eath; for weeks he had persisted that he was well able to go alone. Now suddenly, with hardly a word, this liberty was granted to him. How could Mary leave Peggy and the house, with things in such a state? It now seemed that if she deserted her sister-in-law people really would "say things"; and after all James was going with her father. Almost in a moment James, who had been discounted for

anything beyond seeing to the luggage and valeting his master, came to be regarded as a very reliable person, "more an attendant than a servant." Really nothing much could happen with James always at hand.

D'Eath was immensely relieved. All that morning he was left very much to himself; so much so that he made his man unstrap his luggage and put in the books which he had wished to take, but which Mary had said were too heavy. Not one single thought, no faintest memory of the deed of gift returned to mar his tranquillity; somehow it seemed that the relations between himself and his eldest son were settled, tranquillised, by the evening they had spent together; their new understanding of one another.

The mist of the evening before had turned to early morning rain; the intense heat of the last few days was gone. He felt as though a weight were lifted from him. Nauheim would very likely prove detestable; he had only been to Germany once to take Irene to school in Hamburg, and he had hated the place and the people; detested every trace of it in his daughter. But still a move anywhere, even for the worse, was better than staying on at Dene Royal, living as he had been living of late.

Everything was ready. His train left Cottingham a few minutes past twelve. He was to leave the house at eleven fifteen, with the carriage and pair, because the carriage shook less than the motor—or perhaps because there was a tennis party at a house twelve miles away that afternoon, and Vera had promised to drive her lover, who was expected to lunch, over in the motor.

Soon after ten D'Eath was pottering about in his room, when George knocked at the door and walked in. "If you've got a few minutes to spare, father, Brown's waiting in the study, and as he thinks of going up to town by the same train as you——"

"Well, there's plenty of time." D'Eath was whistling to himself "The Oak and the Ash and the Bonny Ivy Tree" as he made a corner for Jack's "Mad Shepherds," in a place which, five minutes earlier, had been sacred to those flannels

upon which Mary believed his very life to depend. "They have such terribly cold winds abroad," she said, as though the entire globe, apart from England, were governed by one unchanging temperature.

"Oh, for the train, yes, plenty of time." George coloured a little under his father's vague, friendly smile. "But there's that deed of gift business, you know. Brown came down on purpose; only we were all so busy last night."

"Oh yes." D'Eath raised himself, and moving over to his dressing-table began to straighten out the odds and ends still lying there, which James had left to go in his bag. "Oh—yes—the deed!"

"Well, will you come now? Have you finished?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, I'll come now."

"Very well, Uncle Horace and Harold are down there already," answered George, and turned towards the door. "I'll call Charles; he's in the stables."

Left alone D'Eath stood for a moment or so looking at himself in the glass. His lips had again taken up the tune which he had been whistling when his son entered the room. But he was not thinking of it now; he whistled under his breath, regarding himself with a sort of gentle contempt. How foolish he had been to imagine that there would be anything of the George of last night left this morning. George's fine figure was more erect, more well filled, as it were, than ever, his hair like a shining casque.

D'Eath went slowly downstairs, across the hall and into the study.

They were all there: Roger Colburn and his brother Horace, his sisters Caroline and Gertie, his three sons, two of his daughters.

Vera wore a very stiffly starched, clean print; Mary was dressed in blue linen; the men, apart from the two clerics, were in light tweeds, and yet they gave an effect of stuffiness. Perhaps it was the way in which they were sitting, waiting, like nothing in the world so much as

that "party in a parlour, all silent and all damned," thought D'Eath.

Young Brown was there with the deed laid ready on the table.

It was an occasion. Even Caroline was sitting with folded hands, looking stripped without her knitting.

Mr. Brown cleared his throat and rearranged the papers in front of him. "I think we have got it all in order now," he said, and began to read.

In the garden outside the thrushes were singing as though their very souls had drunk of the sweet, warm rain; there was a deep, continuous murmur of wood pigeons in the lime trees. D'Eath moved towards the window and sat there, drawing in the freshness, the scents —lime and mignonette and petunia; the sounds—the deep contralto of the pigeons, which had built in those special trees ever since he could remember anything, the clear soprano of the thrushes, intermingling with the continual twittering of sparrows amidst the creepers. A sudden yearning tenderness swept over him for the place which he was so soon to relinquish; to return to only as a visitor, if ever! It seemed that every sort of arrangement had been made for his dying—taking up even less room than he did now in what old Toms called "a wooden suit"—and no arrangement of any sort for his living.

How lovely the place was—how altogether lovely! And yet how it hurt in its loveliness, for the simple reason that it was not enough. Always there had been something wanting, even from the very first day when he came back there with his bride after a honeymoon in North Wales, where it rained without ceasing. Not that the rain would have mattered if—well, if things had been different, for there are worse fates than to be rain-bound with one you love; worse things than the braving of it shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm—

> "Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
> And feel the Boulevart break again
> To warmth and light and bliss."

D'Eath had quoted this, and Clara had said. "I do think poetry sounds so silly." Yes, there had always been an "if"—something wanting. Of course, he ought to have grown used to the strangeness of the world, his own loneliness, long before this; but it seemed as though his delicacy, his continual drawing apart had sensitised him, like a photographic plate, to every mood of the people around him; that things had grown worse instead of better.

Brown had finished with the main part of the deed of gift, had come to the minor distributions and stipulations. Cherry was to be retained until he wished to retire, and then there was a pension ready for him. Everyone was to be kept on: Dawkins, the head keeper, though his master was quite aware that he regarded him with contempt, and George declared him to be hopeless with the pheasants; Toms, Collins, Davies, old Barnett and his horses. Oh, but they would find the difference! D'Eath himself gave them a free hand, but George! Far, far away back in the Colburn family there was a blank—before that, of course, the Crusaders—and at times D'Eath suspected this blank to have been filled by a tradesman of sorts. George's way with money, which he spent largely, generous for himself alone; his pecuniary memory—which is a thing apart, like a bridge memory, and which none of the really lovable people possess—suggested a progenitor who had jotted down petty accounts upon his shirt cuffs.

Young Brown rounded off the special pensioners in Laishens, old Oxley among the rest; then dropped to a decorous silence.

George got up from his seat and, walking over to the hearth, stood in front of it with an air of possession. Charles, his eyes on the ground, had his terrier on his knees, was pulling at its ears. He was conscious of a distaste for the whole business; it seemed rough on the old man, and he had no liking for Little Laishens. Though these objections were held in check by the memory of his many debts.

"Well, I suppose that's all right, eh?" said George.

He looked like a bumptious schoolboy playing "King of the Castle," thought his father, and then: "What if I don't sign the confounded thing after all? What if I refuse to sign it?"

It seemed as though all the familiar, half-realised sights and scents were laying actual hands upon him, pleading, reproachful. "It's always the little things that count," he thought. These aggressive men and women, the great estate, the house, the manifold responsibilities, were all as nothing to him. It was the sly humour, the odd shifts of the country people; the knowledge of where certain birds built, certain flowers grew; the queer superstitions, the subtle scents, the sounds which caught at his heart-strings. He was like a man with a very efficient and creditable grown-up family by an immaculate wife, who yet preserves a whole series of separate, tender and altogether delightful affections for the toddling offsprings of some secret and unobtrusive mistress. Was it never the things, the people, who loomed largest in life that one loved, only the "swan's nest among the reeds"?

"Now," said young Brown, "if I might trouble you to put your signature just here, Mr. D'Eath."

The words were like a spur to D'Eath, who found himself upon his feet, speaking words which seemed quite outside of himself, violent, defiant:

"No! No—not to-day! I be hanged if I do! I tell you you won't like it; it won't do!" Already his defiance was dropping to that old, fatal trick of appeal. "Let us wait, anyhow, until I come back. I'm sure that it would be better not to sign, make the thing irrevocable—at least, not yet. To wait—to see what happens."

"Not sign! Not sign it now?"

It seemed as though everyone in the room uttered the same words at the same moment, with that dreadful sing-song of a family chorus; all excepting Charles, who murmured something which sounded like "Check there!"

Then came the inevitable—"When everything's settled." It seemed as though the walls of Dene Royal must ooze and echo, be haunted with the oft-repeated, almost hereditary phrase.

The very atmosphere changed. Up to this moment it had been all the easier—disintegrated, like loose garden soil—from the fact that they disagreed so greatly on so many minor points; that they were not quite certain whether, after all, they wished the division to be made absolute. "There are so many things to be considered," that was what they had said.

But now—in a single moment—they were united. It was as though the very air thickened to battlements, fortifications, bristled with *chevaux-de-frise* and gun emplacements.

George himself stiffened like a hound at point; he might have been melted and poured into his skin, set solid and almost unimaginably hard. He moved a little more perfectly to the centre of the hearth, and the act was symbolic, though he said nothing. His whole person showed the weary contempt of cocksure mediocrity for people who don't know their own minds.

Young Brown gave a little laugh, which was half cough. "Come now, Mr. D'Eath, if you will kindly put your name here—just here—I won't trouble you any further." He spoke as though the exact position of the signature made everything quite easy for everyone: almost wheedling, like a doctor with a sick child.

D'Eath glanced round from one blank stony face to another—only Charles was standing with his back to the room staring out of the window. A sort of panic overtook him. It seemed that, somehow or other, they had him fixed. And that damnable paper. The exasperating part of the whole thing was that they were within their rights, that he had brought it all upon himself, simply by giving way.

Through the laden silence came the song of thrushes, the twitter of small birds; a sudden puff of wind sent the

rain drops pattering from off the limes on to the shining laurels beneath the window.

How good the world was! And yet it seemed to D'Eath, at that moment, as though he were permanently beaten by the people upon it, swept down and under by that most terrifying of all realisations—to a sensitive mind—the hard antagonism of one's fellow creatures, the complete apartness of those whom the world would regard as most near and dear.

"I feel that the deed is a mistake," he began obstinately, and again ended upon a note of which he instantly realised the weakness, the futility. "And, after all, I am not so very old; too young to give up everything just yet. Better wait—see how George gets on."

George turned a little sideways, and, taking out his cigar-case, selected a cigar with care, then began cutting off the tip. "After all, my dear father, you're no younger than you were a week ago when you agreed to everything," he said, after a moment's pause, speaking quite civilly, in his stiff, detached way.

"And, Hugh dear, you know what Sir Humphrey said!" broke in Mrs. St. John, with a little gasp. To D'Eath it seemed that his youngest sister moved, spoke, had her being in a series of small explosions, like the engine of a motor-car.

"After all, don't you think it would be a pity to change anything now, at the last moment, Mr. D'Eath? When we've all been led to expect——" began Mr. Brown. He did not even trouble to finish his sentence, did not take his client seriously, was not really disturbed. D'Eath knew this. "Must humour them, take them easy—particularly the elderly ones," that's what he would have said.

"And, after all, he's right. I'm not to be taken seriously; if I had been it would have begun long ago," thought D'Eath, without bitterness, for he knew his own weaknesses, was at home with them.

"When everything's settled and all."

"Well, all I can say is that I think you're behavin' damned queerly, Hugh—damned badly. Makin' fools of us all in this way!" It was old Roger Colburn who spoke, purple in the face, rising to his feet, stumping up and down the room. "As to George, I don't know what George——"

"Let George speak for himself," broke in D'Eath, and turned towards his eldest son. He knew that he was beaten; but all the same he was determined that George should be forced into delivering the ultimatum, which, after all, lay with him. "Remember, you have a son of your own now. Remember that the same sort of thing may come to you—the cuckoo in the nest——"

"My dear father, I don't think this is exactly the sort of time for sentiment—more particularly sentiment which, if you'll forgive me for saying so, is entirely false. As to myself, son or no son"—George stared at his father hardly, though his smooth-shaven face had reddened—"you must acknowledge that you agreed to everything; that there's hardly a single suggestion in that deed which did not emanate from you yourself."

"Perhaps I didn't think sufficiently; realise——" began D'Eath, then broke off. How was it possible to explain that a mere combination of scents and sounds had changed his entire outlook—though was it altogether that? For days past he had been conscious of a sensation of yearning, of vague melancholy.

"Oh, realise!" said George, and for the first time there was the hint of a sneer in his voice. When he realised anything he did so at once; what he did not realise did not exist so far as he was concerned.

Young Brown was tapping on the table, very gently, with the handle of his pen.

"Silly idiot!" thought D'Eath, with a sudden spurt of fierce irritation.

A moment before Mary had risen from her chair, stood hesitating; now she made a definite move. "I think—don't you think—perhaps I'd better tell James—Barnett—counter-order the sandwiches!"

"But I'm going by the twelve-ten train; there's no reason——" began D'Eath, then broke off. How silly, how futile and feeble it all was. And how like a sheep Mary looked, hanging there with her mouth a little open, her hand on the door.

He heard her murmur something like "I thought, as *everything* seemed so unsettled——" with what might have been gentle malice; but he took no notice of her, turned to George, faced him squarely. "You hold me to it then?"

"There is no question of holding," answered the younger man smoothly; "the whole thing was settled, you practically gave your word."

"Oh, well," cried D'Eath, and moving to the table took the pen from young Brown's fingers, then turned and looked round at them all. Once more his old sense of the oddness of life, the whimsicality of human nature came to his rescue, with the realisation that what he was going to sign was no ratification of peace, but a declaration of war—with he himself out of it.

"I warn you—there's something I've seen advertised as 'the little oil bath.'" The corners of his mouth twitched; nothing mattered. After all, that comedy of the Gadarene swine was a serial which ran without ceasing through the book of life. "I'll sign, but all the same I venture to think that you'll find I had my uses—'the little oil bath,' you know."

"But, father, darling, it does seem——" began Mary—her forehead was puckered; really she did not know what to think. "When everything's been settled and all," she went on, then laid an affectionate hand upon her father's shoulder as he leant over the table to sign his name.

CHAPTER XI

D'EATH had been scheduled to stay at Brown's Hotel with his daughter. All the D'Eaths stayed at Brown's, and all the Colburns at Morley's. But on this special occasion Hugh D'Eath—always somewhat of a sport from the family tree, though so carefully trained and pruned—elected to go elsewhere. Perhaps he had taken a dislike to the name which carried a memory of that red-gilled, super-efficient younger partner of Cleaver, Brown & Son.

He chose a hotel in Bloomsbury, because he happened to read the advertisement of it in his paper on the way up to town. A hotel which was the mere fraction of a cycle of such places, without individuality, without memory. At Brown's the very hall porter met him with, "I hope I see you well, sir, and Miss D'Eath too"; or, "We had Mr. Horace D'Eath" or "Mrs. St. John, staying here last week."

There were twenty-eight hours yet before the start for Nauheim. D'Eath wondered what would happen if he went to Cooks' and asked to have his ticket changed; stayed in London for a few days, just to look about him. After all he might never see the dear old place again.

Of course, it was not, really, in the least likely that he would change his plans at the last moment like this. "Everything is arranged." He had grown so accustomed to the phrase that it very nearly mastered him, but not quite.

Saying—"Of course, I'm bound to go to-morrow now," he walked through Covent Garden and down the Strand. conscious of revolt in every fibre of his being.

He had not intended to sign that deed; certainly not

at the last, perhaps never. After all, it was the whole of his past life which he signed away; dull enough, but all he ever had. Well, they had got that now; surely he was free to do what he liked with the remnants which remained over.

Cooks' Strand office was still open, and almost before he knew what he was doing he had changed his ticket to Nauheim for one which would allow him three whole days in town; after that—the deluge.

He went to his club, which he seldom used, and there, by some odd stroke of fate, encountered old Sir Philip Harding, his little pointed moustache dyed a fine glossy black, his face with a plumlike bloom from good living.

"Hallo! D'Eath," he cried. "Having a frisk, shaking a loose leg—eh, what? Let's dine together and then do a music hall."

They dined together. "Nowhere like London; nothing like a free bachelor's life!" said Sir Philip. He chose the dinner; all the most pungent, highly flavoured dishes, with caviare on toast for a savoury. "Skip the joint, eh, old chap?" he said; and when D'Eath answered, "Oh, Lord, yes," laughed knowingly. For to both alike the joint symbolised family life; that awful ritual of a Sunday dinner. They drank a bottle of champagne, and a good deal of very mellow port for which the club was famous. Then they went to the Empire. In between the acts they walked about, Harding with his hat on, very curly and at a tilt. His goggly eyes were on every side at once, ogling the women. He brushed against one, and there were recriminations, apologies, reconciliations; an address jotted down in the old fellow's note book. "Fine woman that," he said when he joined D'Eath; "fine figure, fine understandings, fine everything, damn it all!"

The woman, a meretricious, peroxidised hussy, in a sheath-tight skirt, a waistband and shoulder straps, overshadowed by her big hat like Jonah by his gourd—a hussy that no boy in his twenties would have so much as glanced at—looked round, waved her hand, and wriggled away; moving,

with her tight gown, in a way which reminded D'Eath of Cowper's hare.

During the whole of the rest of the performance Harding discussed legs; it seemed that there was nothing else left to women. He talked of them as Waller, who trained an occasional racehorse for Charles, in his stables upon the Cotswolds, talked of horses. But Waller's talk was infinitely preferable. At least Waller's mares were used to breed from, to produce creatures as fine, as slender-limbed, as satin-coated, as sensitive as themselves; to enhance the world with beauty. Harding's "fillies," as he called them, were good for nothing save the momentary gratification of eyes and senses.

After the show was over the two men went to the Carlton, where they ate devilled bones and drank whiskies and sodas. D'Eath grew inexpressibly melancholy. He might have been a little drunk, but it is certain that nothing had gone to his head. It was all round his heart if anywhere, compressing it to an almost unendurable sense of the utter futility of everything.

He had felt dull and out of it at Dene Royal; he was more than ever dull and out of it here, with old Harding hiccoughing lewd confidences into his ear. He took himself to task, gravely enough. "Perhaps it is that I haven't had enough," he thought, and touched his glass as a sign for the waiter to refill it. After this he felt that he could have sat on the ground for the rest of the night; told "sad stories of the death of kings," poured ashes on his head.

"I don't mind letting you into the know, old chap, 'cause we're friends; we're boon companions—eh, what?" Harding was breathing heavily into his ear. "Look here, you can come and see me, see *us*." He gave a senile chuckle. When he was sober Sir Philip was merely a little more than middle-aged; drunk he was ancient and obscene, like a hoary blue-bottle. "Damned if I don't let you into the secret; show you my little birdie in her nest. Only look here, you mind this, you old buck, no sneaking in when I'm not there; mind you, no poaching; everything strictly

preserved. I know what you country fellows are, up in town for a night or two on business. By gad! don't I know? I was like that myself once, and not too many years ago either. 224, Swinbourne Mansions, Maida Vale. Got that, eh? Hang it all, look here, D'Eath, I tell you what I'll do. You look us up one day next week 'to view,' as the house agent fellows say, and if ever I want a little change, I'll give you the first reversion; damned if I won't. Come, now, that's an offer—224, Swinbourne Mansions; don't you forget it. But mind you, no poaching, no loosing off till I say go. For she's a peach, that's what she is, a little——" Words failed him, and he blew an imaginary kiss.

By the time they got up to go something more than words had failed Harding, and his legs were like those of a new-born lamb. It was a mercy Hugh D'Eath remembered that address, for he found himself obliged to take his host home in a taxi, huddled to a heap in one corner, looking as though he had been taken down from the peg in a pawnshop; his mouth open, his goggle eyes staring blankly, with a sort of desperation, straight in front of him.

There were four flights of stairs to be surmounted at Swinbourne Mansions. "Now if that old quack was right this will be the end of me, and a good job too!" thought D'Eath. But though his heart beat painfully, he got his man to the top and knocked at the door of number 224.

It was flung open with that suddenness which suggests a pounce, and a woman appeared on the threshold in a crumpled, none-too-clean tea-gown: a very mature woman, five feet eight at least, and with an immense amount of figure: tousled, canary coloured hair, and bags like purses beneath her eyes—the "little birdie!"

Harding toppled a trifle forward from his friend's grasp, and she caught him by the arm. "You swine, you!" she said. "An' you as swore you'd be home ter supper at noine and bring the whisky. See if I don't——" She broke off here, catching D'Eath's mild eyes, realised that he was

not the usual obliging and thirsty taxi-driver, and murmured some apology for her "friend."

Harding, who had fallen back against the wall of the tiny ante-room opposite the hall door—Harding of Harding Court, with its famous panelled hall, its musicians' gallery, yew hedges—nodded and leered horribly. "So long, old chap! Shown you a bit of life—eh, what?"

Back at his hotel D'Eath found James, waiting up for him with a martyred air; not that James minded being late; what he did mind was not knowing that his master was going to be late.

As he moved softly about the room D'Eath sat on the edge of the bed and stared at him solemnly; he was a fine domestic animal, well-groomed, well-fed, trained to the house. But what about the real James at the back of all this?

"James," he said, "did you ever see life?"

"Not that I know of, sir," answered James primly; adding to himself, with a mental wink, "I don't think!" wondering about his master as his master was wondering about him; if he were a "bit balmy"—just a master or man.

"Well, don't try to see it," advised D'Eath solemnly. "It's—it's putrid!"

CHAPTER XII

All next morning the thought of old Sir Philip was with D'Eath. So this was what freedom meant to some people! Liberty, that had been his cry, and in its place what dreary licence, what a shrew of a woman compared with whom old Lady Harding would have appeared almost Greuze-like in her beauty and interest. Was this all that there was to be gained by an over-late freedom? Deterioration of body, mind, taste, almost beyond words.

Towards twelve o'clock D'Eath went and sat in the park watching the people. Now and then he raised his hat to some passing acquaintance, but he spoke to no one until he heard a voice exclaim, "Why, if it isn't Mr. D'Eath!" and glanced up to see two women standing before him smiling—one gaily, the other with studied wistfulness. The gay one, very smart in a pale biscuit-coloured dress and black hat, fresh and smooth-cheeked, was Lady Hester Fielden, daughter of the Soult Range Master of hounds; not long married, more innocent-looking than any woman has the right to be, gay, spendthrift, unmoral as a wharf rat, or so people said.

Her red mouth was softly folded, her blue eyes wide and appealing, her pale golden hair broke into ripples over either ear.

The other woman, whom she introduced as her friend, Mrs. Ian Paulton, was dark and intense, with a sallow skin and a drooping brim to her hat; her fine shoulders slouched, her rather heavy red lips were folded into an enigmatic pout; but she said nothing as D'Eath bowed to her, rose from his chair and walked between them up the Row towards Knightsbridge, walked with a swagger, shoulders squared.

"Well, an' how's Mary and Vera, an' all the rest of your little lot?" inquired Lady Hester, carelessly ungrammatical, bowing right and left, twirling her pale pink sunshade.

"Very well, as far as I know." It seemed to D'Eath at the moment as though his family were separated from him, not merely by a four hours' journey, but by æons: that he remembered them but vaguely, as something belonging to the last generation.

The unpleasant taste which old Philip Harding had left upon his mental palate was gone. The sun felt pleasantly warm upon his back, the flower-beds were ablaze, the well-dressed women at his side pleased him, titillated his fancy. Of a sudden he was almost childishly happy. Usually when he walked in the Row it was with one of his relations, who had picked up a special friend, was busy talking, bent all one way, ignoring him; leaving him in that unpleasant position of the third person who does not quite know how or where to walk.

"So that's it, is it?" Lady Hester laughed, glancing at him sideways. "You're out all alone, on the razzle-dazzle, eh? *How* nice." Her limpid, childish gaze rested upon him for a moment with that sort of solemnity which was one of her special assets. "Awfully old, of course," she thought, "but too awfully good-looking and interesting."

"Will you come and see me—let's have a talk over old times?"

D'Eath could remember no old times in common with Lady Hester; surrounded by his family she had never appeared to notice him. But he knew very well what all Vera's friends had said about her; the bitter complaints of her fastness, the way she snatched men away from under their very eyes; until at last—ah, well, Fielden was *bound* to marry her! That was what they all said; and this was by no means the end of the gossip either. How unkind, unfair, women were to one another! Why, she was a mere child, Hebe-like in her fresh bloom.

Lady Hester laughed, divining his thoughts, sharp as

a needle. "Come, and you shall tell me what people used to say about me."

"Oh, that! My dear lady, art is long and time is fleeting!"

"You mean that between what they invented, embroidered, and what they really believed it would fill a book."

"Well, perhaps; but how divinely illustrated," returned D'Eath, with a little bow, all the more charming for its hint of a bygone fashion. He was amused with himself, with her. Quite possibly she might be a minx, but anything more gross was out of the question.

As to Lady Hester, she was delighted with the retort. "Well done! That is pretty of you! Did you hear that, Angela? He's really rather doaty, isn't he?" She half turned to her companion, spoke as though D'Eath were not there.

Mrs. Paulton glanced at him sideways, pouted her lips a trifle more fully, opened her eyes very wide and dropped them again. But she did not speak; if she had been asked why, she would have said, with that jaded truth which is never frankness, that speech was not her "stunt."

"You must come and have tea with me. Do come next Saturday, any time after four. I'm afraid Freddie may be out—polo, Ranelagh, you know. But I dare say we can manage to amuse ourselves." For a moment Lady Hester's eyes rested upon D'Eath with a look of deliberate audacity and understanding; then she turned to her friend. "I suppose you can't come, Angy?"

"No, really—thanks awfully—too awfully, dreadfully busy," breathed Mrs. Paulton.

"She makes birds'-nests," explained Lady Hester in a quick aside. "Most frightfully clever, you know." Her blue eyes were wide, but at the back of them was laughter, the hint of an understood joke betwixt herself and D'Eath.

"Makes what?"

"Birds'-nests. She did a what-do-you-call-it's nest the other day, absolutely, exactly, the very thing. You

know——" she began, then broke off excitedly—"Oh, I say, there's Bobbie Hale. I've never had a chance of a word with him since his divorce, and I do so want to ask him—— Hold on a moment, there's good people," and darted off to intercept a young man who was moving languidly by them.

Left to themselves D'Eath and Mrs. Paulton leant over the rail together, watching the riders. There seemed to be a large preponderance of bright bay and chestnut horses out on this particular morning, and their glossy coats, dappled with shade, were shining in the sunlight.

"Yes, I make birds'-nests," sighed young Mrs. Paulton soulfully. She had folded her arms along the rail and gazed down at her gloved hands, smoothing the white suède over her long fingers. "Some day, not yet of course, but some day, I really do hope that I shall be able to make them better than the birds themselves."

"You have your hands, you see."

"Well, they have their beaks, so it's really quite fair, isn't it? Anyhow, I work frightfully hard. Really, I don't think any of the lower classes realise how hard we *do* work. I'm sure I'm always at it," she added, with a little sigh, a movement of her shoulders as though life were almost too much for her.

"You're very fond of birds, then?" Somehow or other D'Eath felt himself forced into the position of Mamma in Mrs. Markham's history; there seemed nothing to do but ask leading questions upon the subject in hand, conversation was impossible.

"Fond of birds? Oh, dear, no; they're so dreadfully restless, don't you know. And I love, adore, repose."

"Fond of the country then?"

"The country! Oh dear no; it's too dreadfully depressing."

"Then why birds'-nests?"

"Oh, well, of course, it *is* an art—and one has to do something different, doesn't one? What an age Hester

is with that stupid man! After all, pretty well everything came out in the papers; and it wasn't particularly interesting—very commonplace, I thought. Now, if I had a divorce I would like it to be perfectly thrilling. It seems a sort of duty to one's friends, if they stand by you; as, of course, they will if the co-respondent isn't an outsider—that's quite fatal, of course."

"But what does your husband think of—of such theories? Would he be willing to—to co-operate? It seems that a divorce is one of the few affairs in life needing a third."

"My husband?" Mrs. Paulton raised her fine eyes and gazed at him in a hurt sort of way, as though he had been guilty of an indecency. "My husband! Oh, I don't know what he thinks. I hardly ever see him. I'm so dreadfully busy with my nests, and Willy Pyke gets me the grass and feathers and things. Ian wouldn't be the slightest use for anything of that sort. He always struck me as being so clumsy," she added slowly, as though trying to remember the traits of some complete stranger; then, "Oh, Hester, darling! I thought you were never coming."

"My dear, such a lark!" Lady Hester seized her friend's arm, squeezed it. "Bobbie says that there's going to be no end of a shindy. It's all come out that there's been—what do you call the thing?—oh, collusion. Bobbie's wife blabbed. Of course, she thought Captain Sinclair would marry her. I told her he wasn't in the least that sort; but she was always one of those silly women who believe everything a man says. Now he's cooled off she's afraid she'll be left without anybody; at least, that's what Bobbie thinks."

"My dear, how wildly interesting! What's going to happen?"

"Oh, of course it 'ull put the hat on to the decree being made absolute, and Bobbie's perfectly furious. Sinclair's got pots of money, and there would have been whopping damages. What, Mr. D'Eath, not going yet?

Oh, but won't you come home to lunch with me? I'm sure I can make a corner for you."

"I'm afraid I can't—not to-day."

"Oh, well, mind you don't forget Saturday. I can't tell you how disappointed I should be. And I shan't ask anyone else." Lady Hester was holding the hand which he had extended, gazing straight into his eyes with her own appealing orbs. "Then we can have a nice cosy talk together, just us two, eh?"

As she spoke D'Eath felt an odd, insinuating little touch from one finger in the palm of his hand. Could it be that Vera and her set were right, after all? But no, not with those eyes!

Turning out of the park someone hailed D'Eath; it was Sir Philip Harding, wonderfully fresh, jauntier than ever. "D'Eath, you dog! I saw yer! Well, upon my soul, but I am surprised!"

"May I ask why?". D'Eath's tone was icy, but the old man seemed no whit embarrassed by it; he was too well accustomed to the innocent airs of the guilty, as he would have told you with a wink. "The people who look you so damned full in the face, don't you know—never trust 'em. We used to say that with the natives out in India, an' by God it applies to pretty well all alike, black an' white."

"Playin' the gay goat with Lady Hester Fielden of all people! At your age, too! 'Pon my soul, D'Eath, I'm no prude, no one can say I am, but I do draw the line at that sort of a free lance; with her position, an' all that—poor old Kiddington's position. They talk about us men, but upon my soul we have more decency, keep our little affairs *sub rosa*. I know I'd larrup any one of my daughters if I heard of her gettin' herself talked about in the way that girl did, even before she married," he added, roused to a state of virtuous indignation, oblivious of the way in which he had bemoaned the fact of his deserted family's peculiar plainness. "As to that husband of hers, he's an ass. Though they do say that he's talking

of a divorce at last. The very deuce an' all 'ull be to know who to name as co-respondent—or, rather, which. To my certain knowledge there's been——" The old reprobate caught his companion's arm and poured out a string of names.

D'Eath felt sick as the memory of the girl's fresh face rose up before him. "By God, Harding, you're a foul-mouthed, foul-minded beast if ever there was one! It looks as though you had forgotten what a woman of your own class is like. A mere girl like that. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Ashamed! Me?" Harding gave a snort of indignation, then laughed. "Well, just you wait and see. Perhaps Fielden'll take it into his head to name 'em all—there's no knowing what may happen when the worm does turn—an' then we'll see you in court at the tail o' the pack. Only don't say I didn't warn you," he added; laughed again, very knowing, then touched one finger to the curly brim of his hat and was lost in the crowd moving westward for lunch.

CHAPTER XIII

D'EATH lunched alone at his club.

Luncheon over he felt himself at a loose end. There were at least two things which he ought to do: write to his family and tell them he was not staying at Brown's, that he did not intend leaving London for a few days; and then go and report to Sir Humphrey. But the very idea of putting pen to paper paralysed him; even more distasteful was the thought of the outpourings which his letter might evoke. He did not want to hear any of the family news; did not want to know what the family thought or felt. If ever man wished that he might have started life as a foundling, been permitted by fate and inclination to remain celibate, that man was Hugh D'Eath at the stage at which he was now arrived. For, despite the awful example of old Harding, the longing for freedom, the space to breathe, was still strong upon him; the very thought that nobody knew where he was to be found gave him an extraordinary sense of elation. As to Sir Humphrey, for that day anyhow he would keep clear of him. He did not want to be told that he was either worse or better; he did not want to think of himself; only to swim, for once—at last!—with the tide of humanity.

Still the thought of the specialist did give him an idea.

There was a man he used to know who had taken a practice near Dene Royal for a while, then given it up. "My teeth aren't made for grazing," he said; "your hill grass is too short, too sweet; as for the people, they always remind me of something I once read—a mere couple of lines:

"'The cattle are grazing, their heads never raising,
A thousand are feeding like one.'

God only knows how many cases of cerebral congestion I've been called to since I came here; you all get blood to the head, for the want of a little looking up and about you. One day I'll write a medical treatise on the thing."

D'Eath laughed at the very memory of the man's rash, rough speech. He thought oddly, and he spoke his thoughts; no wonder that the gentry disliked him for his brusqueness, that the labouring classes distrusted him because of his unlikeness to any other doctors whom they had known. As to the middle class, the small lawyers, agents, tradesmen, he was anathema to them; the very thought of him in any one of their genteel sick rooms, with the mahogany and crochet-edged covers explained this. But D'Eath had always felt attracted towards him. There was something large about his very gaucheries; with all his rough exterior he had known him to be extraordinarily kind, even tender.

Anyhow, it is certain that the neighbourhood of Cottingham was, of all places, that in which Treherne was bound to show to the least possible advantage; it smothered him, as in its own way it had smothered D'Eath. For there is something about the Midlands—in those parts where the pulses are unquickened by any special industry, roar of machinery—that is almost intolerably slow and complacent. They have not even the sea, with ships which bring far more than their specified cargoes to port—a whiff of adventure, of other worlds; possess all the disadvantages of island life with none of its quickening come and go of tides. Even thus each special county, even in the Midlands, has its own special atmosphere, as distinct as certain houses, certain rooms; and it was the special placidity of the Cottingham people which aggravated Treherne, who declared that they must have the digestive apparatus of all bovine creatures, actually chewed the cud, were in some mysterious way spiritual descendants of Nebuchadnezzar. Among every class he found himself out of it, for all

classes alike were part and parcel of the county. Then his clothes were all wrong, and he was never to be seen at church—a fatal omission, lending a sinister aspect to his undoubted cleverness; "A danged sight too clever by half," that's what someone had said, voicing the general opinion.

Anyhow, he had been a failure, had only stayed a short time, then sold a rapidly diminishing practice and returned to London.

He had sent D'Eath his address. "A dock slum" was what he said; "all the same, there's something of real crude life and humanity, and I have quite a decent house. If ever you are in London, with an hour or so to spare, come and see me."

D'Eath still had the address in his note-book; only that morning he had happened to notice it. A sudden idea came to him. He would not go to Cavendish Square; the very thought of the solemn and ornate ante-room to Sir Humphrey Spender's sanctum depressed him. He would go down to Wapping instead; have a talk over things with Doctor Treherne; go on the top of a bus and get all the fresh air he could.

He took his bus at Piccadilly Circus. The brilliant morning had clouded to a dull, stiflingly hot afternoon. Even the flower women drooped palely under their red umbrellas, which, with flaunting mockery, appeared to label them as part and parcel of the latest Gaiety triumph, "The Girls of the Harem." There seemed to be no wind stirring, and yet some insidious, secret draught filled the air with scraps of straw and splinters of wood pavement, touched the cheek with a hot breath.

One of the flower-sellers climbed D'Eath's bus and seated herself with a vast sigh beside him, her basket—empty save for a few wilted sweet-peas—upon her knee.

As the bus careened down Regent Street they caught a little breath of air from the river. "That's a bit o' all right, ain't it?" she said. "But, my Gawd, what a sweatin' 'ot day I"

D'Eath, wedged tightly in between the rail and his fellow-passenger, agreed that it was hot, but "very pleasant."

"Pleasant! yer calls it, do yer?" said the woman; then with a snort relapsed into silence. It was not until they were past the stopping-place in front of Charing Cross that she spoke again, and then, as though the words were being forced out of her by some overwhelming impulse of self-expression, not in the least because she fancied D'Eath as an audience, desired his interest or understanding.

"Pleasant! Well, if yer arsts me what I thinks of it all it's a tragedy—a blooming tragedy! What's the good of it?—that's what I want ter know. It's like when one o' them there blinkin' Church Army picnic screams tuk us inter the country for a picnic—the free an' 'appy country!—and everywhere as yer wanted ter go it was stuck up as 'ow trespassers 'ud be prosecuted. That's life! If yer asks me, that's my very identical idea o' life." She took off her hat from a head armour-plated with innumerable curling-pins. "They do mike yer 'ead ache, there's no mistike abart that; but a gal don't not seem half dressed wivout 'em," she said, then sighed again—a gusty sigh. "Though what's the good o' toffin' yerself up when there ain't anyone to toff yerself up for, that's what I wants ter know?"

A workman making his way to one of the front seats pushed against her basket, tipping it to one side. "Come now, clumsy!" she cried.

The man laughed. "Keep yer 'air on, me duck," he said.

"Well," remarked the woman at D'Eath's side, "if it hain't a treat to find summun as *can* speak civil. Sort o' mikes the wheels go round, don't it?"

D'Eath turned and glanced at her; she was smiling, artlessly pleased. He had thought, judging from the general impression of her full figure, that she was a mature woman; but now he saw that she was young—five- or

six-and-twenty at most. A pair of long earrings dangled from either ear; her rosy cheeks were smooth and rounded; she had that look of perfect health, of complete broad-bosomed womanliness which, among all the women of London, is the heritage of the coster class alone. With her dark eyes, plaited hair drawn in bosses over either ear, and brilliantly coloured handkerchief crossed above her breast, she might well have been a denizen of the warmer-blooded South, leaning with folded arms upon some window-sill above the Bay of Naples.

Her work-roughened fingers plucked at the feathers of the hat lying atop of her basket, which—with its immense ostrich plumes, shading from dark crimson to pale pink and flame—must, at one time, have presented a gorgeous appearance; but now it was bedraggled, faded, soiled, while even the straw drooped with a dejected air.

"'Tain't much ter look at, that's certain," said the girl, "an' yet ter think as 'ow it went fur ter breck up as 'appy a 'ome as ever was; not as it wouldn't be 'appier now, by a long chalk, if I 'ad the 'andlin' of it. But, there, you can't not never judge by apperiences. 'Ere ter-day an' gorn ter-morrow, in a manner o' speakin'," she added, with an almost malicious tweak at the feathers.

"Come now, things can't be as bad as all that," murmured D'Eath vaguely.

"Bad! That's all yer knows! Seems ter me as they couldn't well not be worse. Tike me Davey as there's toimes as I feel loike makin' an 'ole in the river. No 'un ter miss me neither; no 'un ter say 'Poor devil! so young an' all!' Fished out on a pole wiv a 'ook at the end of it. I've seen 'em scores o' toimes; seen 'em come ter pieces an' all when the river cops thought as 'ow they'd got 'em all cosy; come ter pieces, all along o' bein' in that there stinkin' river! Awful! Fair gives yer the 'orrors, that's what it does!"

"My dear woman——"

"Well, arter all there's worse things nor dyin', an' one o' them's livin'. Sime ole livin' day in day out—livin'

wivout a bloke." Here, it seemed, was the same thought as that which influenced the unknown, erring wife of Bobbie Hale. "That's a nice sorter existence fur a lidy as is a lidy an' not a bloomin' old maid by natchur, nor experience neither."

"Is your husband"—D'Eath hesitated; he had noticed a wedding-ring upon the stumpy third finger hovering with disdain over the hat—"is he"—again, like the rest of the world, he baulked at the word—"have you lost your husband?"

"Lorst!" His neighbour broke into a laugh, that sudden, frank, disarming laugh with which she had greeted the workman's sally; there was a dimple in her broad cheek; the despondent woman of a moment earlier, with all the instinctive theatricality of the born Londoner, was gone; she was girl again, "tickled to death," as she would have said. "Lorst 'im! Did yer ever 'ear the like o' that? Mislide 'im, dropped 'im out, left 'im about! Yes, that's it, left 'im about!" Once again she dropped to a sudden gloom. "Left 'im about ter be picked up by any ole tart as chose ter come along. An' me left!"

"He left you? Well, I can't say much for his taste!"

"Get along with yer." She nudged him, gloom and sunshine chasing each other over her face. "All the same, it weren't 'im as left me. Oh dear, no; not by a long chalk. I ain't the sort as gets left; no, thank yer, not if I knows it!"

"Then—I'm afraid I'm frightfully stupid, but I don't understand. If, as you say, you're alone——"

"Well, I don't mind tellin' yer. It was this way, yer see. I got sort o' tired o' the gentleman as I went off wiv, that's the truf, an' I ups and tell 'im so. Wot's the good o' 'avin' feelings if yer don't express 'em, so ter speak? An' wot's the good o' this 'ere free love as we 'ears so much about in the threepennies if y' ain't free, eh? O' course 'e got 'is shirt out—well, I wouldn't 'a' blimed 'im fur that; it would 'a' been a poor sorter compliment ter me if 'e 'adn't. But that don't excuse 'im

be'avin' in the sorter wye as no gentleman ought to be'ave t' any lidy—'air pullin' an' knife play, an' sech like. The fack is 'e wasn't no class—a blinkin' furriner—Hitalian, that's wot 'e wos, an' not one as I'd as much as looked at when I was single. Now if yer'd seen my Alf! 'E wos a bit of all right, 'e wos. None of yer 'alf bakes about Alf."

"Yet you left 'im?" D'Eath was profoundly interested.

"Well, I left 'im, cause why; I was tired o' jest bein' married. An' I left that there Hitalian—catch me cookin' 'is nasty white worms fur 'im after 'e threatened me wiv a knife! An' I left the gentleman as I went wiv arter that. Scene shifter, 'e was, at the Old Vic. Not as there was nothin' out o' the wye wrong wiv 'im. Only I didn't like 'im, see?—not after a trial, so ter speak. Look 'ere now, if yer don't like another lidy yer can put hup wiv 'er, but if yer don't like a bloke—more particular when you've once thought yer *did* like 'im something special—there's an end of 'im, once for all—a clean wipe out. See wot I mean? Folks do say it's better ter be born lucky than rich, but wot price if yer neither one nor t'other, eh? Arst me another. Wiv Alf now—tell yer straight, I like 'im better nor wotever I did, an' that's wot comes o' 'avin' a little experience. There's times I'd give a deal ter see old Alf again—squint an' all."

"Have you any children?"

"One, but I lost 'im—pneumony." She turned her head a little to one side and spoke drily. "Clever little devil, 'e wos, though I say it as shouldn't. Put me clean off it did when I lost 'im. Well, Alf, 'e's clever too; it was 'im as 'e got it off, see? Public speaker, Alf is—you know. 'Down wiv kings an' members o' Parleyment an' dooks, an' sech like,' sorter lay. Never not 'eard 'is like, I 'aven't—more particular when 'e'd 'ad a extry glass." She paused, then added sadly, "An' never shall agin, I s'pose. Not as the king ever done Alf no 'arm, not as far as I could see. If anyone ever done 'im 'arm it was me. But if a bloke speaks in public—orange boxes

—'Yde Park—*you* know—'e's jest got ter speak agin someone, 'asn't 'e?. Stands ter reason. Else nobody wouldn't not listen to 'im, would they?"

By this time the bus had drawn up at the side of the Royal Exchange.

"I'm afraid I shall have to change here," remarked D'Eath reluctantly.

"Where are yer goin'?"

"Wapping."

"Wappin'. Right y'are; Tower Bridge bus, that's wot you want. I go t' Liverpool Street, I do—an' then on Bethnal Green way."

D'Eath rose from his seat, then a sudden thought struck him. He and this girl were both lonely.

"Supposing you've got half an hour to spare, why not get off here and let us have a cup of tea together," he suggested.

Her face was alight in a moment, belying her drawled, "Well, I don't mind if I do."

It was easy enough to find a quiet café at that time of day, and they sat down together, either side of a marble-topped table, across which she glanced at D'Eath with the bright, eager eyes of a hungry dog: a little uncertain, but eminently friendly. "This is a bit o' all right, ain't it? Yours truly an' a toff. Good thing I'm a married woman, or there ain't no knowin' wot might be gettin' inter the papers. What 'ull we 'ave?"

"You must order," said D'Eath, "anything you like."

"Plain, I reckon, after yer luncheons an' all?" There was a dubious drag in her tone, as of hope against hope. From the top of a bus she had often seen "the toffs" at their lunch in the clubs—"a swellin' o' 'emselves out," as she put it.

"Plain; rather not!" D'Eath had no idea of the alternative, but he risked it; in a mood for the flamboyant, the unexpected.

"Wot 'ull it be then?"

"What you like, as much as you like; it's your party."

"Lor!," said the girl, and grinned, "yer don't not 'alf know wot yer lettin' yerself in for! The things they 'as, entrays an' extrays, an' all." She pored with knit brows over the menu. "I didn't not 'ave only a cup o' tea an' a bit o' bread an' cheese for me brekfus'; that wos at three a.m.; an' nuffin' since then, barrin' a cup o' thick an' a pavin' stone somewhere about eight on me wye from the market," she remarked. And then, after another anxious pause: "Wotcher say ter sausage an' mash an' a nice cup o' tea for a start; then a jam tart or two ter finish off on?"

"Nothing could be better," agreed D'Eath heroically; then drew a breath of relief as a blind beggar with a half-starved dog came in and sat down at the table next to him.

Happily it was a voracious dog, with an immense stretch of jaw, and took the plumpest sausages at a gulp. But, all the same, it was useless for D'Eath to imagine himself unobserved. The flower-girl's eyes slid past him again and again in a desperate effort to remember her manners and not see what she was obviously intended not to see. But with the first jam tart—strawberry at that—it seemed as though things had got beyond bearing.

"It 'ud 'a' bin cheaper ter give the old josser tuppence fur dog's meat, an' 'a' done wiv it," she remarked, with painful mildness. "Besides, it ain't never no good ter get quarrelling wiv yer vittles, even if yer do 'appen ter be in love. It only turns the stummick, an' if yer stummick's turned there don't seem nothing left in life ter mike any sorter song an' dance about."

She herself ate heartily, explaining how her day had begun in Covent Garden soon after dawn.

"It's all very well for them as ain't never bin used ter nuffin' settled," she added. "But fur a gal as 'as 'ad 'er own 'ome, chiffonier an' sofa an' all, an' the milkman callin' regular, it's 'Ell, that's wot it is." She leant forward with both arms on the table, and turned her empty cup round and round, observing the dregs, with

that sort of desperation which seems to lie at the back of the buoyant, boisterous youth of so many women of the people. "If it comes ter that, everyfing's 'Ell. Life's 'Ell, an' peggin' out don't seem no great shakes from wot them there parson lot tells us—no bills fur the wood an' coal as is used fur warmin' yer, that's about all there is to it. Livin' an' dead, jest the sime old 'you.'"

A look as old as the pyramids was on her face; for the time being life held no comfort, death no hope. Her mouth had dropped into that sullen shape which comes so easily to the uneducated and emotional when they are not actually smiling; for the moment she was almost amazingly like Mrs. Ian Paulton.

Then she glanced sideways at the waitress, who was staring curiously. "Gawdblimey, if I 'ad a fice like that I'd let it out on 'ire as a drop scene, else I'd try turnin' it inside out through the mouth. There's no knowin', it might look better that way, an' any'ow, it couldn't not look worse."

This audibly expressed opinion seemed to relieve her feelings, and she poured herself out another cup of tea, though still with a brooding air.

"Look here." D'Eath leant over the table and touched the back of her rough hand coaxingly. "Why not patch things up; go back to your husband?"

"You've 'it it there, ole dear. Why not? Oh, yus, why not?"

"I'm sure he'd be very glad to have you."

"Glad t' 'ave me! You take yer oath! But the fact is, it ain't all so simple as it might seem ter be—at first sight, any'ow." Her gaze met D'Eath's with an air of limpid candour. It was evident that if she were concerned over any special complication, she was conscious of no qualms of conscience, doubts as to the propriety of her own conduct. "Don't yer see, ducky, there's the other lidy ter be considered, an' a girl's got ter play fair."

"Oh, there's another lady, is there? A friend of—a—a——"

"Well, wotcher expect?" She tossed her head, spoke hotly, as though resenting any implied criticism of her one-time mate. "'Tain't likely as my Alf could get 'is own meals, an' keep the plice clean, an' do 'is own job, is it? It's only them there slackers as is any good messin' roun' th' 'ouse doin' a woman's work. An', wotever Alf might be, 'e weren't no slacker; allus in steddy work, 'e wos, ever since I first knowed 'im. If 'e 'adn't been so steddy 'e'd 'ave 'ad more time ter see ter me. An' I would 'a' 'ad more fun an' less money. There ain't nuffin' that don't cut both ways, in a manner o' speakin'. As fur the lidy, if 'e 'ad been a toff, I s'pose 'e'd 'ave 'ad a lidy 'ousekeeper an' gone out fur 'is pleasure. But wot price a lidy 'ousekeeper wiv only two rooms? Arst me another. Not as 'e'd ever fancy 'er as 'e fancied me —fair wild about me, 'e wos. An' 'er wiv no more figger than a kipper—boxed too tight, too. Oh, yus, I saw 'er. 'Cause why; I went outer my way ter see 'er, didn't I? But that ain't all neither; it's that there new kid, poor little devil, as 'elps ter mix things up more comicaller than ever they wos before. Now, if she an' Alf 'adn't gone an' 'ad that there kid——"

She put her hand to her mouth and held it tight, like a child determined not to cry. Her black eyes were wide open and unblinking. As a large tear rolled down one cheek she put out her tongue and licked it shamefacedly from sight.

"A blinkin' cold in me 'ead——" she began; then, "No, seem ter be cryin', don't I? Good Lord! I don't know wot's comin' ter me. More tea, eh?" She filled up the teapot with a lavish hand, so that the pale liquid overflowed the spout and ran in a pool across the table, while she sat and stared at it sombrely, unseeing; then broke out again with sudden passion:

"It's a blimed ugly kid, anyway!"

She dashed one hand across her eyes, propped her elbows on the table, her chin on her clasped hands, and stared fiercely down the long empty room at the little

group of waitresses who stood talking round the cashier's desk. And it is forever thus. When a woman has been hurt, or hurt herself, it is the smug, prosperous members of her own sex she resents, not the men, who are more often than not responsible.

She had no feeling of rancour, or so it seemed, for the woman who had taken her place; *she* would have her hands full enough with Alf and the kid; she and "the Kipper," they were both taking their chances. It was the spotless attire, the plump self-sufficiency of these others which raised her ire. As to herself——

"Wotcher've put inter yer mouf yer bound ter chew, an' wot yer've chewed yer bound ter swaller, if yer've got any manners about yer." That was her philosophy of life as she propounded it to D'Eath at their next meeting. But for all that her fierce cry—"It's a blimed ugly kid!"—had revealed more than she knew.

There was a moment's silence between them. Then she broke out again, with a restless movement like some wild animal. "I only wish as I'd never seen the blinkin' 'at. I only wish that them there feathers 'adn't never not been plucked from off of the blinkin' fowl as growed 'em."

"Look here," said D'Eath, "why not tell me all about it from the very beginning. Sometimes it helps just to tell things, and sometimes two people can puzzle out a difficulty better than one."

"Two 'eads better nor one, eh, though one is a calf's?" she flashed back at him, with one of her wide smiles. "Well, I reckon you've 'ad yer troubles, same as me. Love, an' not knowin', wotcher want, eh?—that's at the bottom o' most o' 'em. Folks dyin'—now that's wot I calls a sittin' still sorter trouble; yer can't do nuffin' there. But love! That's a ragin' up an' down, no rest no way, like the toof-ache or belly-ache. Yer lays onter the pain ter ease it, an' all the time yer don't know wot the devil you'll be after next. Wotcher've got yer don't want, an' wotcher want yer don't get. I'll bet me boots that's wot's wrong wiv you likewise, ole dear," she added, eyeing

D'Eath with sympathy, "else you wouldn't not 'ave that understandin' way about yer——"

"Come now," said D'Eath, "consider my grey hairs. I think you may take it for granted that I've done with all that sort of thing."

"Not you. Look 'ere, tell yer strite, I 'ad an old great-granny as was close on ninety-five when she died. An' jest the identical day 'fore she popped off I was arstin' 'er when a woman got sorter past fallin' in love. Wotcher think she says? 'Yer must arst sum'un older nor me, my ducky.' A real 'ot 'un, she was; a regular chronic an' no mistike; an' years an' years an' donkey's years older nor wot you are. I don't call you old; I calls yer just nice."

Something warm, long unknown, crept over D'Eath's face; and the girl gave a crow of laughter, put up her hands as though to warm them. "Blushin'—well, I never! Blushin' like a bloomin' kid!"

D'Eath gave an embarrassed laugh. "Come now, I'm a very dull subject of conversation. I want you to tell me——"

"Tell yer wot?"

"Well, what has it all got to do with the hat?" He spoke eagerly, was conscious of a youthful, an enthralling interest and curiosity which did indeed make him feel like a kid.

The girl glanced at her headgear, drooping upon a peg, where the waitress—tweaking it from off the table—had hung it with a gesture of supreme contempt.

"If ever that stuck-up piece 'ad as much as a shop-walker after 'er it's as much as she's ever 'ad," the flower-seller had remarked; then added, "An' that 'at! Lordy, the tales as it could tell! I've lived, an' that's a fact!"

There was the conscious pride of splendid tragedy in her brooding glance, her scorn for the untouched air of the waitress.

"It was that there 'at as started the 'ole thing,"

she went on. "Yer see, I'd sorter got inter the 'abit o' bein' married. Alf was steddy, an' I was steddy, an' then there was the kid. Lord bless yer soul, I'd more nor 'alf forgotten as there was any sorter world beyond that there blinkin' kitchen sink an' bed, wiv Alf a-snorin' alongside o' me. If I'd a taken things easier it 'ud a bin better. But I wasn't not made that way, an' I took ter bein' married same way as I took the measles, the 'ole 'og—you know—spotted from 'ead ter foot, in a manner o' speakin'. Why, I tell yer strite, when I went up ter the top o' the buildin' ter do me bit o' washing a Thursdays —which was my day, an' not ter be altered or the world 'ud fall down acause o' the other ladies in the buildin' a-takin' their turns—it was an event, that's wot it was! An' that 'ull tell yer. I never not went to a theayter, an' I never not went ter a pitcher pallus neither. I was that vicious set on stayin' at 'ome as it 'ud fair giv yer the miserables ter think of. It weren't 'ealthy, not no ways, it weren't. I'd be different ter that if I went back now. All work an' no play makes Jack a dull boy; an' there's 'alf-time in marriage same as there is in any other ole thing. But, strite, that's 'ow I was until I went an' put inter a raffle as a Jew bloke down our street was gettin' up fur a 'at, see? An' won it. There's the blinkin' 'at" —she gave a jerk of her thumb in the direction of the bedraggled object hanging upon the peg—"an' 'ere's me."

There was a moment's pause; then she touched her broad bosom and repeated again, "'Ere's me!" as though with a sort of wonder. "An' another lidy a-sharin' my Alf's bed an' board. Not as 'ow it's much o' a bed, that lumpy! I was allus sayin' as 'ow I'd take it ter pieces an' give the flock a real good teasin' up, but I never not did it, an' I'm glad now. Any'ow, there'll be room fur 'im an' 'er—an' the lumps. 'Er wiv a figger like a kipper —an' a four-a-penny kipper at that. There was a furrin gentleman lived down our street said as 'ow 'e couldn't do wiv English ladies, 'cause 'e never knowed their backs from their fronts. Yus"—this in answer to D'Eath's

glance of inquiry—"it was the Hitalian, yer've 'it it there. An' in the end it was *me* as couldn't do wiv *'im*. So 'e was nicely 'ad, 'e was—done to a turn!"

"But what had the hat to do with it all?"

"Well, yer see, it was like this. A lidy friend arst me ter go ter a darnse, an'. I went, 'cause there didn't not seem ter be any other chance o' showin' that I'd got an 'at, wiv the shops in the next street, so ter speak. An' then chaps got talkin' ter me, payin' me compliments an' sech like, all very free an' easy an' pleasant. An'—'Ere's ole life back agin!' says I. An' I went ter the 'alls wiv one, an' ter the pitchers wiv another, an' ter one 'op an' another. An' I found out as yer weren't not, so ter speak, branded for life acause yer was married, so long as yer'd kep' yer looks an' yer figger. Then Alf 'e started talkin' nasty, an' there was words; an' one thing leadin' ter another, till one fine evening out I marches, 'at an' all. Gawd, wot a world! I didn't not never think nor plan ter do it. It came over me all suddenlike—my birfday an' all. But, look 'ere, this 'ull tell yer. Wotcher think Alf 'ad gorn an' guv me fur a birfday present that very day? A tin o' knife-powder! 'Cause why? 'Cause I was such 'dead nuts on keepin' things all bright an' shinin'' —leastways, that's wot 'e ses, wiv 'is silly smile. An' there's no bloomin' doubt about it, 'e 'as a silly smile when 'e sets out ter be clever. Not that 'e meant ter be clever then. It weren't not that. Though Gawd only knows wot 'e did mean! Gawd only knows wot men ever do mean! 'Owever, it settled 'is 'ash—'ot an' all, it did! A tin o' knife-powder! An' that there Hitalian givin' me a brooch as looked the dead spit o' real gold—near as no matter, anyway."

She paused, then flung her hands palm upwards upon the table in a curiously un-English gesture. "But Gawd bless yer 'eart, things ain't all wot they looks, not by a long chalk! An' so I found the fust time as ever I took the darned thing roun' ter me uncle. If I'd 'a' known as 'ow that chap peddled in jewellery, I wouldn't never

'ave set no store by it, nor by 'im neither. For I ain't got no belief in people as gives away wot it's their business ter sell. But, there, I didn't know much of 'im nor 'is ways then. It's wot I *thought* 'e might be—see?—as took me, furrin ways an' all. If I 'adn't got it inter me 'ead as 'e was somefing out of the common I wouldn't 'ave gorn off wiv 'im, that's a cert! After that—well, if *you'd* seen the muck as 'e expected a girl ter live upon—not much o' that neither: three jumps at the pantry door an' a glass o' cold water. Well, I s'pose as I'd better be movin'. Can't stay 'ere yappin' all day, an' the best o' friends must part, as the flea said ter the dead tyke."

She rose, sighing, as she spoke and pinned on that emblem of tragedy which had been a hat. "I ain't got no address 'cause I dosses at the Salvation Army shelter, see? A lidies' club, gents not admitted! But if ever y' 'ave a fancy ter come along t' O'Leary's stall in Covent Garden, 'tween four an' eight any mornin', an' arsts fur 'Rene Phillips, you'll find yours truly. On at shellin' peas or some sech silly game as adds ter the leisure moments o' the slaveys o' the upper classes."

CHAPTER XIV

It was past five by the time D'Eath turned aside from seeing his new friend off on her bus; stood a while—with a wilted bunch of sweet peas in his button-hole—wondering whether it were too late to go and see Treherne that evening, whether he lived or merely had a consulting-room at the Wapping address; and finally—after being jostled from side to side by an impatient and contemptuous crowd—arrived at the conclusion that, as he had come so far, he might as well go on, and mounted the steps of the first Tower Bridge bus which came his way.

It had been an odd day. He reviewed the morning—Lady Hester and her decadent friend in the Row, old Philip Harding; the dull lunch at the club, where the number of arid, bald heads and expressionless faces depressed him almost beyond words. He himself had few vanities, but his thick grey hair was among the number. To his mind there was something indecent in a perfectly bald cranium, in the insolent assumption of the owner that even so he might be an ornament to society. If elderly males would only have their coats of arms emblazoned on the shining surface, even dye it some cheerful colour as the Russians dye their Easter eggs, he had a feeling that it might add to the gaiety of nations. He remembered mentioning this idea to his sister Caroline, and the puzzled way in which she had looked at him, objected "But, my dear Hugh, it really doesn't matter with men." For she belonged to that age when men were regarded as the licensed transgressors of most laws of beauty and decency. There were, of course, certain things which even they might *not* do; but on the whole the censure withheld from them went to weigh down the scales against the opposite sex, left to

preserve unaided the purity of British ideals and family life.

What a relief it was to be amongst people whose standards were an unknown quantity; as unexpected as those of the flower-girl with her superb disregard of morality.

In this lay the difference between her type and that of Lady Hester and her friends, that mysterious, intriguing Bobbie Hale, for instance. Here D'Eath drew himself up sharply. Of course, Lady Hester was perfectly straight, the daughter of his lifelong neighbour. But those others, if they were immoral it was because they knew it, deliberately thought to create fresh sensations with vices which cried stale fish. 'Rene Phillips, on the contrary, lived immorally because it seemed the natural thing to do; had no special thought of vice or virtue; just took, frankly enough, what offered. If she did not like what she had got, that was not because it was wrong, but because she had been "a blinkin' fool an' didn't know wot was wot," or because "luck" had queered her pitch.

D'Eath left his bus at Tower Bridge; from thence, acting under the instructions of various small boys, he cut down some steps to the level of the water; then passed along St. Katherine's Way until he reached the address sent to him by Treherne—the Wapping Pier Head.

The prison-like streets which led to it already showed grey, wan with the weariness of a long and arduous day. Huge warehouses shut out all view of the river. The walls were black with grime, the narrow dim way—blocked with horses, drays, men—worked out, as it were, in woolly neutral tints. The air was pregnant with the scent of spices, of pitch and hemp; the whole scene reminiscent—in appearance and atmosphere—of nothing so much as some ancient, frousty piece of tapestry, in which the zig-zag of cranes represented an archaic screed of lettering.

Once clear of the actual street, D'Eath found himself blocked by a moving bridge over an inlet to the docks,

before which he was obliged to wait for a good quarter of an hour, while it yawned, stretched itself slowly and deliberately, then opened and admitted a barge, drawing at its stern a long string of satellites, high laden with sawn timber.

The water in the canal was black, with an oily sheen. The thick air overlaid everything like a pall, pressing it down to a sort of dead flatness, so that the voice of the bridge tender, as he called to the men on the barges, sounded far away, blankly indifferent.

The barges themselves—the foremost drawn by a dejected horse which paced the narrow cindered way with drooping head—moved with smooth solemnity; the stacks of wood were covered with black tarpaulin. The whole thing was like a funeral; rather a conglomeration, an essence, of funerals, long since affecting the very atmosphere. From here and there, up and down the river, sounded the mournful hoot of sirens.

Then, suddenly, once the bridge was past, D'Eath came to a fine, double row of stately houses, with carved and pillared porticoes, beautifully decorated fanlights, at right angles and running to the river. The dark houses, with the dignified open space between them, the shrubs and flagged paths, serving as frame to a wide, unexpected stretch of sky and water, alive with mast and funnel, broken by trails of foam and waving pennants of smoke.

It seemed to D'Eath like the Promised Land. The whole place, indeed, and the way by which he arrived at it, might have well stood for the scene of some second Pilgrim's Progress.

Treherne's house was the last to the right, larger, more stately than the others. After some delay the door was opened by a man in his shirt-sleeves—tall, heavily built, and very clean. Doctor Treherne was not at home, but was expected back at any minute. The man examined D'Eath shrewdly, with no pretence, as he answered his question, clearly sizing him up. Then, remarking that he might as well come in and wait, he led him through a

perfectly bare hall, smelling of iodoform, up a wide staircase with dark carved banisters; and opening a door upon the first landing, ushered him into a large room, with two long narrow windows giving on to the square, and an immense rounded bay which actually overhung the river, so that one might well shake hands with any homeward-bound mariner some half-way up his mast, look to have the glass broken by sudden turn of yard or jib.

The room, flooded with late sunshine, was barely furnished; the carpet, which had probably done service at Chingford, was not nearly large enough, and there were stretches of bare boards at either end. Somehow that carpet, with its apologetic, alien air, was characteristic of the room, of the changed life of its owner, of the very position of the house, that spacious window leading on to the river with its many moods, its manifold cargoes, its vivid interests. Here men came and went from every sort of port with every sort of cargo; they quarrelled fiercely, with knives to help out their words; they swore strange, mouth-filling oaths. The policeman whom D'Eath had spoken to at the side of the moving bridge told him that it was an awful neighbourhood, unsafe for any stranger at nights. "They come outer them back alleyways after sunset for all the world like rats," he said. "The river police and us, there's some strange tales as we could tell; folks wouldn't believe 'alf o' 'em, all cosy in their beds away up West."

There was the broad open life of the river and sea; the sailors—Dagoes, Squareheads—black, white, yellow—child-like, reckless, superstitious; and on shore that network of strange infamies which human depravity for ever weaves around such places. Above all, there was movement and life; every sort of extreme of good and evil, strange, lurid histories. That very man who had opened the door to him, thought D'Eath; one could only guess at the things which he knew, had seen, with those bright little eyes of his, sunken so deeply to either side of the battered nose.

As he came in to say that Nurse Fenton wondered if the gentleman might not like a cup of tea, he moved like a cat, despite his heavy boots, with curiously delicate and deliberate steps. Nurse Fenton must be the fresh-faced girl in the white cap and apron who had stepped out of one of the lower rooms and across the hall as he entered. There had been something whimsical in her face; she, too, was one of those who, for all her youth, understood this Comedy of Errors which we call Life.

He moved to the window and hung out. Tucked in beneath it was a tiny strip of garden showing a few sparse nasturtiums and mallows. Then came the river wall, with a barge close against it. Farther to the right the open end of the square gave on to a narrow pierhead, upon which a group of men were unloading oranges from another barge. One or two of the frail boxes had broken open, and the fruit was heaped in a glowing pile upon the grey causeway, encircled by a little group of wistful children, who were held back by one stout policeman, the blue uniform striking the only distinct note in a scene which seemed to have been washed in with two colours, a greyish-blue and shades of orange; for by now it was past seven, and the sun low amid a network of chimneys and cranes.

A moment later Treherne entered the room, with an exclamation of surprise as he realised his visitor.

"Mr. D'Eath! O'Hagan couldn't make you out; your name did for him. 'A sort o' a furrin bloke,' that was what he said. You, of all people! You and your Midlands, and 'a sort o' a furrin bloke!' What can have happened to you?" He clasped D'Eath's hand, glancing at him keenly, with bright, rather short-sighted eyes. "By Jove, but I'm glad to see you! Come, let's have a look at you!" He drew him round facing the window as he spoke. "How are you, eh? It looks to me as though things had begun to wear a bit thin with you. But it was always like that. You saw too far, too much for all those folks with their heads in a bag."

D'Eath laughed. "I remember your simile. 'The cattle are grazing,' etc. Well, it seems that I'm not even to do that now; to be cut off from the little life I ever had and just exist—for so long as the fates care to allow me—in a German health resort of all places!"

"Pshaw!" Treherne gave a snort. "That lunacy! It's a habit, nothing more! You don't look to me ill—organically ill, I mean; just over-finely drawn, restless, on the edge of things. What do they say it is?"

"Heart."

"Heart?" Treherne turned his head, gave him a sharp glance. "Tell me about it; what you think of doing; where do you think of going. One thing's certain, you've had enough grazing. I always had a sort of feeling that you would come to the end of it sooner or later, that's why I gave you my address. Tell me all about it."

He pulled a comfortable arm-chair into the last patch of sunshine, and made his visitor sit down; then laid a box of cigarettes by his side, and lit a stumpy dark pipe for himself.

"Now, out with it; confession's good for the soul, and I have not the very faintest qualms on the subject of poaching another man's preserves. Tell me everything you can."

As D'Eath spoke—haltingly at first, then with greater ease, touching lightly, whimsically on his family, the way they took things—the doctor watched him, his heavy head with its shock of hair thrust a little forward, drawing steadily at his pipe.

At the end of the recital, with that curiously clumsy movement common to him earning for him the appellation of "that Bear," he made D'Eath open his coat and shirt while he sounded him. O'Hagan, coming in and out meanwhile, laying some sort of a meal, took not the slightest notice of what was going on. Once the nurse opened the door. "I'm going now, Doctor; the O'Toole child's stopped bleeding, so I took him home"

—"Adenoids," interpolated Treherne in an aside to his friend—"and Mrs. Affan's going on quite nicely. I made her comfortable for the night."

"All right," Treherne had his ear to his stethoscope, and did not look up. The young nurse gave D'Eath a nod, as though to say, "No need to worry now, you're in good hands," and slipped from the room. It seemed that at last he had chanced upon a world where fuss of any kind, always his pet abhorrence, was non-existent.

O'Hagan, arranging the knives and forks with immense, careful hands, remarked absently: "That there Pilkington chap's been on the booze again; kicked 'is wife downstairs. She cum round ter 'ave 'er eye sewed up, but I said as 'ow you was out an' likely ter remain out—'er darnation eye!" He raised the salt-cellar and flattened the contents of it carefully with a large palm. "The skipper o' the *Rosie Lorne* 'as gone an' 'ad a stiff 'un shipped aboard o' 'im by the crimps in place o' a drunk; the Owd Man wouldn't never not 'a' found it out—fur they put 'im straight inter 'is bunk—if it 'adn't bin as 'ow the rest o' the crew was too boozed ter get the anchor catted, an' the mate went in among them with a belayin' pin. Skipper cum along 'ere about three, wantin' you; but I says as 'ow you 'adn't got time fur stiff 'uns, an' it was the coroner as they should be arter." He took up a spoon, gazed at it anxiously, then lifted a corner of the table-cloth and gave it an extra polish. "That there wife o' 'Igginson's 'as gone an' 'ad triplets. They cum round 'ere fur you. But as it wus all over I didn't see as 'ow you wus wanted. If a woman can 'ave triplets, she can get over 'avin' 'em widout wastin' yer toime—or so it seems ter me," he added; stood for a moment with his immense hands poised above the table, then murmured something about "fetchin' th' beer," and slid from the room.

"Sir Humphrey's a great man," said Treherne at last, straightening himself, "and I don't in the least expect that he's ever even heard of my existence; but for all that

I'd take my davy there's nothing organically wrong with that heart of yours, D'Eath. It seems to me that it's nothing but what the layman calls a "tired heart"; there's certainly no cardiac valvular weakness. The beats are a very little irregular—a trifle intermittent, but that might mean nothing more than nervous dyspepsia. Do up your things and get back into that comfortable chair. O'Hagan will be here in a jiffy with the drinks. A pint of beer for each of us; he's sworn off it until after seven, and then he drinks it in here with me."

"Conversion?"

"Lord, no! A strained heart—done for him as far as his profession goes—and some pretty severe head injuries that would make any sort of heavy drinking fatal. A heavyweight prizefighter was O'Hagan—the 'Wapping Wonder,' that's what they used to call him. He's been pretty well all over the world, that chap; stood up against pretty well everyone worth fighting of his own weight. But he's got to go slow now unless he wants to peg out. He's a queer chap, for all his size; he has the deftest hands, the lightest step of any man I ever met, and tender-hearted! I run a sort of clinic, you know, with Nurse Fenton and another woman to help me, and I shall never forget going into the room downstairs one day and finding O'Hagan before the fire in a flannel apron washing a baby."

"You must have an immensely interesting life down here," remarked D'Eath. His voice dragged flatly; quite suddenly he had become conscious of that sense of devastating fatigue—that fatigue from which a man might well, and thankfully, die—which had so often assailed him at Dene Royal. It had been a wonderful day. But after all, he was outside of it; it had nothing to do with him. He just brushed the lives of all these people, but he meant nothing to them. He was going to Nauheim; he was going to die. He never had done anything; he never would do anything—and in a few months, if he lived, he would be fifty-three.

It struck him that his life had been like some dull

geometrical drawing—done with compass and ruler, tidily enough, on a dull grey slate—which some infernal or celestial, in any case tyrannical, schoolmaster had smeared over with a wet sponge; not quite annihilating it, but robbing it of its one virtue of order and neatness, so that there was, in effect, nothing left.

Then O'Hagan came in with the beer—drinking down his own portion in one long, solemn draught—and tackling his supper, D'Eath began to feel better. But even when he had laid down his knife and fork, emptied his tankard, his face showed something of that wistful air of an unwanted child, which had so often touched Treherne in the old days. "He has the look of someone who has been among 'the little people,'" he had once told a friend of his, describing the squire of Dene Royal.

"I don't see why the devil you should go to Nauheim, or anywhere else where you don't want to go," he broke out now, ramming the tobacco into his pipe with his little finger.

"You don't think it matters; you don't think it's necessary—that it would make any difference? Does that mean that you feel there's nothing really wrong?"

"Oh, I don't mean that there's nothing wrong, by any manner of means. There's a great deal that's wrong: your vitality, your powers of resistance have pretty well run out. But it seems to me that what you want more than anything else is not a course of German waters, but happiness, interest in life. That you've got pot-bound, as the gardeners say. An' you know it, too, which very few of us do. Nauheim's all right in its way; a patient of mine's going there in a couple of days, but only because one must send him to some place where he'll be forced into considering his health—can't possibly do any work. His life has been too full, yours too empty, there's the difference."

"Oh, well, I'm bound to go now—everything's settled. As a matter of fact, I'm supposed to have started already."

"I don't see how that's got anything to do with it,"

remarked Treherne, with the rough obstinacy which had made him so unpopular among patients who like a physician to take their own view of their own case. "Why don't you do just whatever you feel inclined to do? I tell you honestly there is a weakness, and it won't be helped by forcing yourself to anything; I'm dead certain of that. Inclination is a subtle sort of thing. It may be moral at times to go against it, but it's seldom healthy—not natural for one thing—more particularly for a man who is temporarily on the down grade. It wears him as it wears any sort of machine to clap the brakes on too often—keep 'em going."

"But, Treherne, look here; you know what people like mine are, the sort of outcry there'll be if I tell them that I've changed my mind at the last moment. And then—to go back to Dene Royal in disgrace, as it were! How horribly they would resent—I hate—it. No, old chap; it can't be done. I dare say there's not much wrong. To-day—well, I've been on the go all day and felt topping. But it's come to this: I've got to float with the stream. You say the same thing yourself."

"But what stream—a stream of their evolving or your own?" Treherne leaned forward, and went on, emphasising his words with the pipe which he held in his hand. "What I want to know is this. Why the devil should you tell them anything? It seems to me that they've got all they can ever want out of you. Why should you go back to Dene Royal, where they will all expect you into dying"—D'Eath started at the words, with a sudden vivid memory of Susie's flushed, scornful face—"dying of heart disease? Oh, I know what they are, these good people; they and their invalids—close culturing death! Every impulse of life nipped in the bud, with 'Oh, my dearest, but you know you mustn't venture on that!' The wrapping of you up and away! Why not stay on in London for a while at least—try what an altogether fresh atmosphere will do for you? Why not—by Gad, why not stay on here and help me with my work? O'Hagan will—— Oh, is that

you, O'Hagan?" he broke off suddenly, as the door opened and a vast, noiseless figure moved towards them.

"Would I be lightin' up? There's a man 'ere as 'as 'ad 'is thumb tuk off by one o' the sliding gangways at Black Eagle Wharf." O'Hagan's tone was casual; they could see his figure bend sideways in the gloom as he struck a match upon the seat of his pants; then came a faint spurt of light which he held to the gas-jet, adjusting it carefully, his pipe in one corner of his mouth. "Some chewed 'baccy, I told 'im; that's the thing ter stop the bleedin'—it was a nigger in Santa Rosalie as put me up ter that. But this 'ere chap won't not listen ter reason —wants ter see you. Best draw the curtains, eh, Doctor? That light shines sorter orkerd on the river; the pilots ain't not likin' it."

"Is the man waiting?" inquired Treherne.

"Yus; though there's nuffin' wot you can do, 'an' so I tells im."

"I'm not so sure about that; the thumb might be sewed on, you know, O'Hagan." Treherne rose, knocking the ashes from his pipe as he spoke.

"Catch the dog first," retorted O'Hagan nonchalantly.

"What dog?"

"Why, the dog as ate it afore ever 'e 'ad the 'orse sense ter pick it hup. If the gennelman's stayin' the night I'll 'ave ter be borrorin' a sheet from 'is Riverence."

D'Eath was not staying the night. There was James, who was more or less responsible, to think of. "James and O'Hagan. Ye heavens, what a contrast!" he thought. And yet both serving-men; both sprung from much the same class.

CHAPTER XV

At first, hearing Treherne's suggestion that he should not go to Nauheim after all, should not even allow his family to hear of his change of plans, had carried with it, to D'Eath's mind, the attraction of the fantastic, the impossible.

All that next day it haunted him with a sort of sly, elusive delight. By time night came again the idea had familiarised itself to a companionable joke.

Another morning and he had so far shaken himself free as to be conscious of a new interest in life; a feeling of freshness and ardour in contrast with which James—strictly drilled by Mary as to what his master might and might not be allowed to do—became insupportable. One thing he could and would do: break loose from James's yoke and send him back whence he came. The whole stolid weight of the man thrown against his getting up to breakfast decided him upon this point. It was all very well to have breakfast in bed if one felt inclined to do so, but to realise that from breakfast in bed one was expected to slide into the habit of whole mornings there, then whole days, this was beyond bearing. D'Eath hesitated long over what he was to say to the fellow, how he was to save his feelings; but when once he took the plunge things came surprisingly easy. After all, James had no feelings of any kind save for his own comfort, and in a minor degree for the under-housemaid at Dene Royal—so far as she affected him. There were German waiters in the hotel, and he did not like them; they were "no class." He was quite ready to go back to the country, and far too unimaginative to realise the confused nature of his master's plans, the unconvincing manner in which he was given to

understand that D'Eath was starting for Germany that very evening, and had decided to wait until he arrived before engaging another servant on account of the language difficulty.

Before leaving, James went to the bank and cashed a considerable cheque, settled the hotel bill, and saw all the luggage down ready in the hall. He even went to Cooks' for small German change and notes. He filled the flask, and gave the order for sandwiches. He was minutely conscientious in all he did because he was so glad to be free from the thought of living among foreigners who were such fools as not to understand his language. At Dene Royal foreign travel had seemed like a thing to give oneself airs about; in London it had sunk to the level of mixing with people who wore dirty shirts and knew nothing whatever about racing.

He did not stay and see his master off from Victoria that evening, because this would mean another night in town. Cooks' man would be there, and would make sure that Mr. D'Eath had everything which he needed.

James was accustomed to deal with people of settled plans; people who wanted a good deal of moving, but, once started, moved slowly and surely until their prearranged transit was at an end. Most of the families he had served with looked out their return journeys before they started anywhere.

That any gentleman, more especially "an invalid gentleman"—as James had got into the habit of describing his master, feeling that it added to his own importance—should do anything so out of all reason as to make ready for a journey he did not intend to take was quite beyond James's powers of conjecture. From the day D'Eath's ticket was taken and paid for he was as good as gone.

As to Hugh D'Eath himself, if he were acting a part it is certain that he deceived himself fully as much as he deceived anyone else, for, of course, he intended to go to Nauheim; in the language of his own kind, everything "was settled," and that ought to have made it as

tragically certain as matrimony itself. He was certain that a week or so earlier Mary, turning the leaves of her diary, had written against this special date, "Dear Father left England for Nauheim to-day."

He even sent a wire—"Just off to the station"; never thought of it developing into a lie.

At seven-thirty, after an early dinner, a taxi was called and his luggage placed upon it.

"Victoria Station." It was the hall-porter who gave the order to the driver, even added on his own initiative "Continental Express platform." Everyone knew where D'Eath was going, for though he himself might have passed unnoticed, James had made a distinct impression in a hotel where gentlemen's gentlemen were practically unknown.

It was a perfectly still evening, showing that clear, translucent grey tint, faintly shot with rose, which is so characteristic of the end of a hot, dusty London day. St. Martin's Lane was crowded with people who thronged the early doors of the theatres.

As D'Eath's taxi swung out into Trafalgar Square, which he had always loved, which, with all the rest of London—or, rather, all it stood for—seemed to have grown to mean something quite fresh during the last few days, a sort of sickness came over him at the very thought of Nauheim. He had always longed to travel, but banishment like this was an altogether different affair; to see any new country, however beautiful, through the medium of a hydro, permeated with medicine bottles, doctors, nurses, the hopeless weariness of perpetual ill-health; it would be like a jelly of fruit and sparkling wine strained through flannel, tasting of wool.

Just as the taxi turned into the top of Whitehall he pulled the communication cord and gave the driver an order, which puzzled him so that he had to draw up at the kerb, lean round over the side of the cab to have it repeated, make quite sure that he had heard aright.

All the way to Wapping, Hugh D'Eath, a sober, a presumably sober, country squire, the head of a family—

true, the family had shown a desire to manage their own and his affairs without any further help, yet still the head of a family—a man of over fifty, eloping—eloping all the more criminally in that he eloped alone, a very odd affair altogether, where oddness was a sin—suffered no qualms of conscience, hatched no more nefarious plans; was conscious, indeed, of nothing beyond an extraordinary sense of exhilaration and escape, made vocal by a couple of lines from "The Little Vulgar Boy," which he found himself chanting under his breath:

> "He did not go to Jericho; he went to Mrs. Cobb,
> And changed a shilling, which in town the people call a bob."

That volume of "Ingoldsby Legends"! How he had delighted in it! How he had wept when it was confiscated by his nurse on account of its awful familiarity with the devil and all his works!

> "It was not for himself so much as for that vulgar child,
> He said 'a pint of double X, and please to draw it mild.'"

Ah, here indeed were visions of O'Hagan and his talent for carrying three brimming tankards all at once, moving his feet with so much sureness that his body hung smoothly as some celestial orb.

Of course, the whole thing was immoral, almost criminal. Smoking late by the open window above the river, where the tide was coming in with a saltish tang upon the lips, Treherne and he agreed upon this point. But Treherne stood firm: "Criminal methods are, after all, the only means which are of any use in grappling with really stupid people," he declared. "The lies that I've told to my patients for their own good; the muck that I've given them! After all, to banish yourself to a place the very idea of which you shrink from, just to give up for the sake of giving in, there's a form of suicide, there's immorality for you! Anyhow, try this for a little while;

you are not bound to it; you are bound to nothing. You can go where you like, any moment you like; but that not looking ahead is the best half of my prescription. All your life you've been overloaded with other people's ideas of what you ought to be, to do; let's have an end of all such mufflings. Here in Wapping it is the unexpected which always happens. Suppose we take that for your tonic, just to start with!"

Next day D'Eath wrote his first letter, purporting to come from Nauheim. Treherne's other patient, who was leaving London that night, had promised to post it immediately on arrival; he was also to post other letters, forward any which arrived there; was immensely interested in the whole affair. "That's one good thing you've done, at any rate, D'Eath," declared the doctor on his return from this good-bye visit; "amused a man who had persistently refused to be amused for at least three years, to my certain knowledge."

D'Eath had shrunk from the writing of that letter; felt that it would present almost unbearable difficulties and shames. But it did nothing of the kind. Words flowed easily; he discovered in himself a facility, a delight, in inventions, such as, with a little cultivation, might well run to authorship. That the production filled him with pride may be gathered from a remark which he made to himself on the subject. "Well, after all, there's William de Morgan; he was as old, perhaps older, than I am when he started!"

The epistle itself was short, a masterpiece of restraint. He did not say that he had arrived at Nauheim; he allowed this to be inferred by the address at the top of the letter, the address of the hydro to which Sir Humphrey Spender had recommended him. He made no actual mention of the journey, but he did say he was very tired—here he spoke no more than the truth; that the doctor thought he might go on quite well with complete quiet, but any sudden surprise or shock would be dangerous—and in this he showed the wisdom of the serpent, for there must be no

telegrams, no sudden arrivals; that he had sent James away because he felt that he was getting upon his nerves, but that he was well attended by his present servant—with a mental picture of O'Hagan; that they all considered he was much better among complete strangers, at least for the present, so his dear Mary must not worry about him, as he realised the absolute necessity of her continued presence at home.

The artifice of it all, the fact that he inquired minutely concerning every single member of the family—so that Mary might be too deeply engaged in considering her answers to find time or space for awkward questions—was beyond words. It seemed like a case of a buried talent for prevarication asserting itself under pressure; the most significant part of the whole affair being that D'Eath himself regarded it as nothing more than a forestalling of the truth. "For, of course, I shall go sooner or later!" That was what he told himself.

CHAPTER XVI

THE man who has never felt himself specially influenced by women, save from a sense of duty or some definite outward pressure, is in a dangerous position—forever on the edge of water of the depth of which he is completely ignorant. In youth a plunge comes more or less naturally; it may be bracing. Youth flounders to a safe shore, or swims easily. In any case, the experience is useful. But with maturity everything becomes more complicated, possibly serious. The moral being that we had best run into danger, risk every sort of contagion during our salad days. D'Eath's own reflection upon what happened that next Saturday, when he paid his promised visit to Lady Hester Fielden, was that there is no fool like an old fool. To some extent the ironical humour of his self-analysis and observation helped to save him. But that was the merest chance. If Lady Hester had been less deeply engaged, or in another sort of mood—the prowling, looking-round mood—here was a victim pathetically ready to her hand. A victim gullible beyond words. So gullible that old Harding's prophecy as to seeing him at the tail of a divorce court pack might have well come true, had Lady Hester—carelessly, for want of something better to do—swept him into her net: even conceived the idea that a herd might serve to distract attention from the greatest, or rather latest and most-favoured delinquent.

The care with which he dressed himself, actually peevish over James's absence, might have warned him; then there were the risks he ran of having his continued presence in London betrayed by Lady Hester. But he was not to be warned, hiding his head in a tangle of reflections upon his years, his family.

The proof of his state lay in the fact that his very first waking thought was of this engagement; that he lunched at his club punctually at one, having taken up what Susie would have called his "glad rags" with him in a suit-case, changed there; that he was ready at least an hour before he had the face to start, and that he lingered to buy flowers on his way.

His realised thoughts were purely paternal. Life could be enthralling; if he could once interest Lady Hester in all the things which had come upon him as so new, so delightful, it might give her something definite to do, put an end to that spreading wake of gossip which followed her every movement. Simply enough he judged other people by himself. To know that he, his private affairs, his most intimate relationships were the subject of general and adverse discussion would have left him stripped, sore and ashamed. He had not the very faintest idea that anything so beautiful, so appealing as Lady Hester, so closely resembling—some secret inanity drove him to this comparison—an all exquisite and fragile wind-flower, could find happiness only in a glare of publicity, an endless succession of erotic passions; that there are people—always have been, always will be—to whom notoriety, easy and exciting, means far more than fame with its over-late ripening.

During all those intervening days this feeling for Lady Hester must have been with him, for he had found himself continually thinking—in connection with 'Rene Phillips, with the house at Wapping, with Treherne, O'Hagan—"that will amuse her, that will touch her." The whole thing, indeed, seemed to have taken to itself a permanent and almost historic place in his life. It was going to be a very wonderful friendship, there was no doubt about that.

Then, in ten minutes—less—it was all over.

And here it was—for everything in life is an affair of compensations—that D'Eath's maturity, or his sense of humour, saved him. For he did not "make a hole in the river," as Mrs. Phillips would have put it: did not even hover on the brink; nor did he throw himself into that

orgy of dissipation which Lady Hester herself had described as a "razzle dazzle"; simply went to his club and indulged in a shade stronger than usual whisky-and-soda. Still the thing hurt—hurt damnably; while his pain was by no means diminished by his reflections that, after all, he was only a stupid old buffer, and what else could be expected?

This is what happened. The footman who answered the door in Grosvenor Square said that Lady Hester was not at home, upon which D'Eath insisted that he was expected, had been invited.

At this the man hesitated. He was a new-comer, but he had been given his instructions, believed that he understood them. Lady Hester was not at home to the world in general, but she was expecting one gentleman to tea, a Captain Inglis. He had heard this gentleman discussed in the servants' hall, and D'Eath did not quite seem to answer to the description; but he spoke with so much quiet assurance, was so completely in the hall—laying down his hat and umbrella, hugging his bouquet—before the man had time to make any further protest, that he was hypnotised into leading him upstairs. After all, the whole thing was entirely Lady Hester's own fault; she had been crossing the hall when Captain Inglis rang—with his own special ring, which they had agreed upon—and had opened the hall door herself, said nothing to anyone.

With his hand actually upon the door of his mistress's sanctum, the man asked the visitor's name—perfunctorily, because he believed that he already knew it. Even D'Eath was struck by the gasp, the look of bewilderment, dismay, with which his answer was received; but by then it was too late to retreat, and the unfortunate man threw open the door, stuttering some incoherent syllable.

D'Eath heard a feminine voice rap out, "What the devil——" and then he was in the room, he and his flowers.

It was the sunny side of the square, and the outside blinds were down. For a moment he could distinguish nothing very clearly; then Lady Hester emerged, at first

sketchily, then quite clearly—her flushed face, the sort of disorder of her hair; after this the elegance and luxury of the room with its delicate brocades and massed flowers; lastly, a young man, who had risen from the sofa and now stood by one of the windows, smoothing his hand over the back of his head.

"Oh!" said Lady Hester, "is it you?" She hesitated, as though she could scarcely remember the name, then added: "Mr. D'Eath?", and put out a cool hand.

She was not in the very least embarrassed; she took no pains to hide her feelings; she wanted him away, and showed it, frankly, brutally.

D'Eath felt an ass. His own courtesy had him at a disadvantage; it would have seemed like a sort of insult to say: "Oh, well, I see I'm not wanted!" and turn and leave the room, though that was what Lady Hester herself would have described as "tact."

In place of this he murmured, inanely enough: "Saturday, you know"; then added, "I brought you some flowers." His own voice sounded far away and odd. As his hostess volunteered no remark, he added something about—"Coals to Newcastle," and laid his offering upon the nearest table, glad to get rid of it.

"Thanks awfully."

"Not at all. You said you would be in, you know."

"Oh, but not this Saturday, was it?" Lady Hester moved over to the mantelpiece and re-arranged some photos which were propped up against the glass, photos of more or less beautiful young men. She did not ask D'Eath to sit down. It was quite clear she had forgotten her invitation to him, and that her one idea was to show him, quite plainly, that he was not wanted—morally elbow him from the room.

The young man who had been standing by the window moved a little forward, sat down in a low chair, thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and stretching out his legs regarded his feet with an air of absorbed interest; then

raised one across his knee and smoothed the purple silk sock with a caressing hand.

Lady Hester's lips tightened; her eyes, cold and insolent, were full upon D'Eath; but she said nothing.

"I suppose that Mr. Fielden's down at Ranelagh? What team does he play in?" A sudden feeling of obstinacy had come over D'Eath; he was miserably beaten, and he knew it; but if she wanted him gone he was determined to drive her to the necessity of openly dismissing him. At the back of his mind was a sort of hope that he might have been deceived in his impression of the pair, the look of that sofa; that she might, in some way or other, justify herself. For the sake of her class if for nothing else.

He had, however, little conception of the coarseness of the material with which he had to deal.

"Look here, Mr. D'Eath, I'm frightfully sorry, but really you've made a mistake. And that stupid man! I told him to say 'not at home' to everyone. The fact is that I—Captain Inglis and I—are rehearsing for some theatricals, very much pressed for time." Her finger was on the bell as she spoke.

"Then——"

"If you don't mind—another day." She extended a cool hand. The young footman, still very red in the face, was at the door. There seemed no course left for D'Eath save to take his departure, acknowledge his defeat.

And yet he was not altogether crushed, some spirit was left in him; nor was he altogether that unlovable creature, a perfect man, for over his whisky-and-soda—having done with that grovelling reflection on being "nothing more than an old buffer"—he reflected savagely enough that it would "serve that ——" (here he used a specific term which Vera and young Helstone, discussing their respective kennels, employed with the greatest freedom, and from which he had always shrunk as one of the ugliest words in the English language) "right if her husband did divorce her."

He was sorry for poor old Kiddington, he thought. And then his humour reasserted itself. What a fool he had been! And after all, in thinking of Lord Kiddington, were not any sort of children preferable to dull children?

Supposing he had been the man sitting on the sofa with Lady Hester, might he not have sincerely admired the strength of mind, the determination which she showed in getting rid of an unwelcome visitor?

CHAPTER XVII

TREHERNE'S friend left for Nauheim the day before D'Eath paid his first and last visit to Lady Hester Fielden. That was Friday, the twenty-fourth of July; on that day England, along with Russia and France, were still giving elder-brother advice to Serbia, which still remained detached and far away from the general life of the people.

The very next week it began to seem as though the outer world were jostling, rubbing elbows with—or, in the language of Wapping, "shovin'"—England, hitherto so serenely sea-ringed and aloof.

For so long as the quarrel had lain 'twixt Serbia and Austria there had been scarcely a flutter. The country was like some complacent British matron who reads of divorce suits in the papers and remains unmoved, knowing herself inviolable, forgetting that even in this twentieth century there is such a thing as rape.

When the trouble began to spread to Germany and Russia, Wapping, at least, was stirred. There were Wapping men in Hamburg and the Baltic ports. The uneasiness fringed the maze of streets, followed the river, the shipping with its sailors.

To the back of that islet—up which those slow-moving barges had passed upon the day of D'Eath's initiation—lay the London Docks, in twin basins. The men from the ships which lay there and hung against the riverside gathered in groups, talking little, spitting much, and yet animated, drawn together by some common sense of impending trouble. Here and there groups of Indian or Chinese forgathered with their own kind; races dropped apart, even there, where the blood is so mixed.

On Friday, the thirty-first—the Friday following the departure of Treherne's friend—O'Hagan came into the sitting-room where the two men were awaiting supper, sitting smoking in silence by the open window, with a torn fragment of a bill-head, upon which was scrawled in blue chalk this message: "Arsk the dokter ter pleeze cum at wons ter Mr. Affan's shop, ware a man 'as bin knifed bad."

"I'd 'ave me supper fust if I was you," remarked O'Hagan, with his air of heavy weariness, that odd swing between brogue and cockney. "Like enuff the man's dead by now, an' 'im honly a b——y Rooshun when all's said an' done."

"But, O'Hagan, the Russians will be our Allies if the worst comes to the worst——"

"Them there Rooshuns an' Prooshuns, there ain't nuffin' ter choose atween 'em one way or t'other. It was 'is wife as did 'im in, an' she orter know. Sarve 'im b——y well right, that's wot I sye. Them dirty furriners! Wot do we want wid 'em an' thur dirty ways! The sooner they're all killed off the better fur us."

It was a lurid evening; the sunset sky, hot red and purple, piled the west with immense clouds, against which the riverside chimneys stood out as though cut in black velvet and pasted upon it; the river itself was like molten lead. All day it had been almost unbearably close, and D'Eath was dead tired; why, he did not know, for he had done little beyond making periodical pilgrimages to the Tower Bridge in search of fresh editions of the evening papers, which had begun to appear before midday.

The man who had been stabbed in Affan's stifling little gaming den, which styled itself "The Marine Store," died, and his wife was detained in custody awaiting her trial. By the end of the week everybody had forgotten about her. But somehow it was this murder which seemed to mark the beginning of the war for Hugh D'Eath, and from this onward feeling ran high around the docks. The

possible fighting on land did not seem to matter, but at sea things were already happening, and it was perfectly marvellous how news travelled.

On Sunday, the second, German troops invaded Luxemburg, and the ever-smouldering antipathy against "Squareheads" of all kinds rose to fever height; while the story of how British merchantmen were being detained in Hamburg ran in with the tide.

Already O'Hagan's wife's second cousin, married to a German baker, had taken up her quarters with Ling-Wing as a sort of national protest. The two barricaded themselves into Ling's one upper room, next door to "The Black Boye," and when the deserted husband kicked at the door, shouting abuse and supplication, weeping, they leaned out of the window and laughed at him; at least, the woman laughed, while Ling hovered in the background, smiling his inscrutable smile, and the boys of Wapping pelted the unfortunate German with mud and other filth.

O'Hagan's wife's cousin only stayed with the Chinaman for a couple of days, for she did not like him or his ways, which she declared to be "beastly"; but, as she said, nothing could have shown "that there Muller what she thought of him and all his gory race better than going off with a Chink."

That Sunday passed heavily, weighted by the general idleness, the uncertainty; ships which might have sailed were delayed, because no one knew what was going to happen.

Sitting by the window that evening D'Eath suddenly remarked: "I suppose Mr. Whitacre will have posted that letter by now." He spoke as though under the pressure of a sudden idea, and yet the thought had come to him again and again; supposing that all this trouble forced England into war with Germany, as now seemed certain, and he was officially supposed to be in Nauheim, what would happen? Shame, compunction, and a sort of inward exhilaration, excitement possessed him.

"He was supposed to arrive on the twenty-eighth, stopping a night at Wiesbaden," answered Treherne, leaning back in his chair, his pipe in his hand, blowing out a great puff of smoke, which he watched with an absorbed and far-away gaze as it floated towards the ceiling and hung there, for though both window and door were open no breath of air stirred.

He, too, was thinking how oddly the immense tragedy of war might affect that tiny comedy which he and D'Eath had spread out upon their puppet stage.

Of one thing he was certain. The people at Dene Royal would not disturb themselves over-much with thoughts of the man sitting opposite to him, fine drawn by the heat and restlessness of the day, delicate, lovable; capable of a thousand modulations of feeling, intuition, fine sensitiveness, keen enjoyment, if only some sympathetic hand were at work upon his heart strings. He had been like a viol in an orchestra where a brass trumpet was the one instrument to have attracted attention.

Treherne himself would be glad if he could think that D'Eath's family did suffer. But they would not; they were not of that kind, unless it should happen that this war affected their pockets, their position, and then they would only suffer for themselves; that almost unendurable sense of pity for the waste, the loss, the pain, which was already overwhelming him, drenching him in deep waters, would scarcely touch them. To his mind they represented an impregnable fortress of selfishness, built up layer upon layer by successive generations, from the prevailing type of which D'Eath himself stood out as a sort of sport.

Midnight of Tuesday, the fourth, brought the declaration of war between Germany and England.

Next afternoon, the fifth—when that strange, swarming movement of people too anxious and excited to remain in their houses, so noticeable in London during those first intense days, had reached its zenith—the groom who

had been sent to Chingford for the paper, later than usual, for there had been people to lunch with horses and carriages and he could not be spared, brought back the news to Dene Royal, along with that first letter from Nauheim.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE thought of their father, actually in Germany at the outbreak of war, did not affect Hugh D'Eath's family very greatly. He counted for so little. In their own way they were fond of him, but they blundered over him and past him. He represented to them much what the twilight does to people without imagination, incapable of appreciating its thousand subtle graduations: something time-wasting and futile. Besides, from their point of view—which was not a point at all, but a solid wedge of generalities—he was an old man and a non-combatant. They—or rather England—had always behaved decently to people of that sort, and they did not see why other countries should not do the same, in a lesser degree, of course, but that would be their misfortune rather than their fault.

Of course, it might be "awkward," or "uncomfortable." Perhaps that was the extent of their fears so far as their father was concerned. If he did not like being in Nauheim with the war on, of course he would come home.

Horace D'Eath and old Roger Colburn and Colonel Helstone all said the same thing.

As to the war itself, that did not greatly surprise them; partly because under such a Government they had felt that anything might happen. They declared that they had expected it, quoted Lord Roberts; but they had no idea how ludicrously disproportionate were their expectations to the actual thing; and here they were at one with the rest of their generation, all so very cocksure, so braced up by their sense of superiority to everything and everyone which had ever gone before.

In Cottingham Club one old general did indeed declare his conviction that there would not be a young man left

in Europe by the time that the war came to an end, wore itself out; and this thought deepened the lines on his fine old face, hardened his blue eyes with that expression of looking ahead, living over again unmentionable things which the very word "war" brings to those who know something of what it may mean. A few of the other retired military men, whose juniors were apt to forget that their whole life had not been spent in the club arm-chairs, agreed with him; forgot their gout, forgot Home Rule; almost, but not quite, forgot their party politics; though it is certain that even they had no realisation of the possible concrete truth, the dreadful truth of old General Bancroft's words.

But to most the whole thing was like a mustard plaster, so loosely laid to the skin, so cooled off by the Channel—lying like a fine linen handkerchief between the two—that there was no actual "bite" left.

And yet in oddly diverse ways they must have had some perception of what it might mean. Lady Fitzgibbon, for instance! For though she declared that Sir Thomas was certain the whole affair would be over by the autumn—and as he was Mayor of Cottingham "he ought to know if anyone did"—ordered eight dozen tinned tongues, six dozen of paté de fois gras, and two dozen fine Yorkshire hams from the Army and Navy Stores—on the fifth of August, too!

Of course, all this was before people really understood that business would go on as usual, whatever happened. After that even the undertakers felt assured that, should more or less everybody happen to be killed in France or Flanders, the Government would still supply them with something to bury, even at the sacrifice of their own persons.

In Dene Royal itself they had tried to keep the upsetting news of the war from Peggy. In their hearts they all realised that nothing ever could upset that young person, so long as her own personal comfort was assured; but in her present condition it seemed the proper thing

to credit her with the femininity, the sensibility of the Victorians.

Certainly it would have taken something more than a European war to affect Peggy D'Eath at this juncture.

"It's not in the least likely that anyone will expect George to fight," she said, "so why need I worry?"

During these few days Peggy had thrown off her dangerous weakness. She was like a blade of wheat; there seemed nothing of her, and yet she was so persistent, so full of a sort of greedy vitality that she lived where another more robust-looking woman might have died. Apart from all this she had in front of her the happy realisation that now the baby was born she could really begin to do things again, go about as usual. She did not seem to realise that while she gained in strength the child lost; or if she did she would not allow herself to consider it, or anything else which might serve to keep her back. She was quite nice to George, but she did not need him, though she would not have liked him to go to the war. As a matter of fact, her whole being was concentrated upon this business of getting well; she was a good patient, taking her nourishment regularly, reminding the nurse if it were a moment late. The nurse herself declared it was like tending a machine; and indeed that was what Peggy's body, her strength represented to her, an apparatus for getting the greatest amount of amusement possible out of life.

The only way in which she felt the war was connected with a plan she had formed for leaving the baby with Mary and the nurse, and making George take her to some gay French watering-place directly she was well enough. Now, of course, this was out of the question. Still, she did not waste time and strength bemoaning the inevitable, but like that same blade of wheat—turned by a clod—pushed herself out in another direction. She would go up to Scarborough; it was always pleasant there in August and there would be people she knew.

George, in his heavy way, was more disturbed. Of

course, the enemy would be completely smashed, and that in next to no time; but still the war would upset things. There were committees forming upon which he sat, in common with the rector, old Roger Colburn, Lord Kiddington, and all the other county magnates, for the encouragement of recruiting. On these committees George was regarded as an authority upon foreign affairs. He ordered a French daily paper; for a week he opened it every day and glanced at the headlines, conscious of his own prestige as the only man in the district with any experience of foreign affairs; then put it aside. After the first week he did not even open the papers, and neatly rolled copies accumulated until Lady Rose Harvey, Kiddington's eldest daughter, saw and begged them for making into a species of patent fire-lighter, by means of which she hoped to encourage the villagers to give up using firewood, and so save England. Everybody was very busy, excited, and in some ways happier than they had ever been before. Gertie St. John was in Cottingham helping the Red Cross by means of theatricals, of which the chief feature was the charming Pompadour costumes, absolutely true to history.

Mary did all that she could, but she was terribly upset because the Chingford hospital had requisitioned the services of the Boy Scout who did the boots and knives, and this grievance overshadowed her whole horizon. Anyhow, there were, as yet, no patients in the hospital, and she did not believe that there ever would be any, for it was certain that the war would be over before they were able to get wounded men back from France, at least in any numbers. "Why, they've hardly gone yet," she said, "and who knows, all sorts of *things* may happen." As a matter of fact, she could not believe for a single moment that the Almighty would not intervene and prevent them from all being made very uncomfortable. Here the rector was with her. "For are we not in the hands of the Lord?" That was what he said, without any sign of Germanic boasting; for the people who are really quite sure of

themselves and their friends do not boast; it is not good form. Really that was one reason why the German Emperor never would, never could win the war; he was not a gentleman. King Edward had been known to say as much, quite plainly.

As the news of the horrors in Belgium came to them they were awed; but, after all, things like that could not happen in England. There, in the pastoral heart of the Midlands, was the heart of that inviolate matron who was once all of England, the England which governed and gave weight. At the back of the minds of many of the individual wives and mothers was the idea that, after all, there had been "things said" about the way nuns "went on"; that all foreign women were notoriously loose; that in some vague way they must have "encouraged" the German soldiery.

"Well, I don't know, my dear," said the Dowager Lady Kiddington. "Of course, it's all very dreadful, perfectly shocking, but I somehow can't imagine that any man would ever dare to take any sort of a liberty with me. It's like women I know who complain of being stared at, even followed in the streets of London. It must be *something* about *them,* that's what I say."

Perhaps there were not many who actually agreed with the old lady in what she said. But for all that she voiced a general, and wider, feeling that what was happening to other peoples could not possibly, under any circumstances, happen to the English. Never—never—could they imagine themselves as stripped of all self-respect and regard; sheer animal through fear and pain and desperate need.

It was a beautiful summer, full of fruitfulness and promise. The elm trees, with their largesse of shade for drooping cattle, were softly solid masses of dull greenery; like no other tree on earth, and yet all earth, brooding, unshaken, maternal. Down the park from Dene Royal the giant beeches went "curtseying," as old Mrs. Toms said, their wide shining skirts sweeping the grass. Upon the lower slopes of the hills, with their wonderful panoply of cloud shadows,

fields of wheat and oats and barley were enamelled in varying shades of gold and gold-shot-silver. At the edge of every coppice, the border of every cart rut, over every scrap of waste ground—and these were many, for the farmers were lavish of their land—stood tall masses of willow-strife and foxglove, underlaid by the vivid wonderful blue of crane's-bill; a blue which reflected, blended with the purple above it.

The grass on the hillside was brownish, with a pungent burnt scent, slippery as glass; but the wide plain with its double silver ribbon of river was still a vivid green diapered with innumerable cattle and sheep, moving, slow as the century, with bent heads.

The harvest was early, and already the oats were being cut. Great yellow wains moved in and out of the stack-yard. At the home farm, Davies himself was on the rick in his shirt-sleeves with the sweat running down his brick-red face, hard at work pitching; for it seemed as though the weather were almost too good to last, and there had been a heavy dew—"an unkid flop," as they called it—the night before. Once he straightened himself, and stood for a while gazing out over the wide, sun-steeped valley. "It do seem sorter queer—seein' them there beeses a-grazin' so contented loike along them hams, an' us a-gettin' in the harvest same as never was—ter think as over in France there do be men loike mad a-fightin' o' one another, great guns an' all. An' many a nice young chap a-gone ter 'is death afore this."

Old Sam Oxley, up on the rick alongside of him—son of the ancient Gaffer Oxley—followed the bailiff's glance with vague, watery blue eyes, as indifferent as a child's. "Them does saey as 'ow there do be a power o' shootin' over there, an' our men a-mortifyin' them there Germans summat cruel. My son Jim's lad do be out in them parts now." He paused, smiling meditatively. "Eh, well, it do be foine weather fur shootin', that's certain sure."

"Oi wunner wot them there Frenchies be a-doin' abut their 'arvesties, pure devils," said Davies, wiping his arm

across his face and grasping his fork afresh as a new load rolled up. In some vague way he was uneasy, oppressed, although the harvest was more than a fair one.

"Well, the gentry do tell as it ain't no manner o' use startin' their shootin' until the stubble do be clear, an' them's the ones as orter know," answered old Sam serenely, and leant forward, his fork poised ready to catch the first sheaf; for though he was close on seventy he was still hale and hearty, jealous not to be outdone by his son Jim, who was pitcher a-top of this fresh load.

At that moment a girl of twelve came running, stumbling up the rough roadway along which Susie and her father had ridden seven months earlier. She had no hat on, and her lint white hair and faded pinafore blended softly with the silver puffs upon the willow-strife.

As she scurried into the stack yard with the odd, sideways fluttering movement of a scared fowl, it could be seen that her eyes were wide, her face white, smeared with dust and tears.

"Feyther! feyther!" she called to the man upon the wagon; then up to the curious old face peering down upon her from the rick: "Gran'dad! feyther! there's a letter comed; an' mother seys as 'owe yer must cum 'ome, an' I wasn't ter tell yer. But—oh, feyther, feyther! Ower Jim—ower Jim!" She snatched her apron to her mouth and held it there, her narrow little face convulsed.

"Eh?"

"Shot—dead!" sobbed the child. "Ower Jim!" and flung her apron over her head, while her father threw his fork on to the rick and climbed down, slowly and ponderously, from off the wagon; then took her hand and moved off with her, without a word: stumbling a little, the fine healthy red of his face turned to a sickly yellow.

"Eh, dear!" said old Sam. "Tut, tut. Did yer ever 'ear the loike o' that, an' ower Jim's not yet risin' twenty. Moy Jim do be fair flummoxed—eh, bailiff? Dearie, dear now, an' 'im an' 'is wife that sot on young Jim as never was. Eh me! but it's fearsome doin' this 'ere fightin'.

I reckon as 'ow I'd best go an' tell feyther; uncommon set on young Jim the ole chap did be, fur sure—'is furst great gran'son an' all. I'm danged if it dwarn't be an unkid 'ard world wid these 'ere dratted wars an' all. Eh! but I mun go tell feyther."

There were tears in the old man's faintly blue eyes as he scrambled slowly and painfully from off the rick, and yet he trembled with excitement. It was so seldom that there was ever any news to tell anyone, particularly his father, who would remark with scorn of his choicest scrap of gossip, "Did Oi know as 'ow Queen Anne wur dead?" as though he still heard everything there was to be heard long before his son.

Once upon firm ground old Sam walked briskly enough, with the small, quick steps of virile old age. Davies could follow him with his eyes down the hill almost to the village, going all tipitty—tipitty; could see how his son Jim, great, strong, broad-shouldered man, lurched in his walk so that the little maid put out a hand to steady him.

Davies's own eyes were full of tears. Young Jim had been his ploughman until he joined the Army a year before war broke out; joined it because he wanted to see something of the world; and now he was dead.

"Them there b——y Germanses, that there danged Kaiser! I'd rape an' scrape 'em proper if I could get at 'em! A pore lad as never did no 'arm to no one, an' ploughed as straight a furrow as never was. It fair taeks the 'eart outer the 'arvest, that it do."

The Oxleys were by custom chapel-folk; but on great occasions they went to church, and they were all there next Sunday, in one of the front pews, dressed in deep mourning.

It was a baking hot day; the sun poured with sickening radiance through the unshaded windows. The whole church was alive with the buzz of flies, heavy with the faint smell of new black.

There was a sound of bitter, subdued weeping from

Jim's mother, as the rector, towards the end of his sermon, spoke of young Oxley cut off in the flower of his youth, giving his life for his country; a weeping which was subdued because the gentry were there, and even grief must know its place; while through it all—the deep sobs, the ornately rounded sentences—like a small, whiffling wind ran the sound of suppressed tears, snifflings from Jim's sisters, for he had been an only son, from the aunts and cousins who filled two entire pews with a long line of black, stretching right across the church, broken only by the centre aisle.

Next day Jim Oxley—"owd Jim," as he had been called, though he was not yet forty—handed in a week's notice to Davies.

"Oi've kinder got ter go an' 'ave a smack at 'em, bailiff," was all he said.

That was the beginning of the war for Laishens. After a while, through church and chapel alike, the people who wore mourning seemed to spread like a blight upon the wheat.

Vera D'Eath's wedding was hurried on, shorn of all its glories, for young Helstone had been called up with his detachment of Yeomanry. Irene started nursing in one of the Red Cross hospitals, though she did not persevere at it for long, complained of a want of scope. Charles was at home but one night before embarking for France. It seemed as though George and Mary were to be left alone to carry on the traditions of the house, for ever talking of retrenchment, and yet, in their heart of hearts, equally determined that nothing should be changed, relinquished. In this Mary's persistence, her tenacity were beyond him, beyond all words. The whole of her narrow nature had been concentrated upon Dene Royal, Laishens, Little Laishens. Outwardly unselfish, she was as tenacious as a limpet where her own position was concerned. She was not clever enough to put it plainly to herself, but it amounted to this. If there were no more houses like Dene Royal, no more subservient villagers,

no system of low wages and doles, her importance, the importance of her kind would be gone for ever.

The rector gave up his afternoon tea, but he did not give up his after-dinner port. Harold talked of applying for a post as Army Chaplain.

Peggy had her trip to Scarborough and a perfect trousseau of new frocks. George took her up and left her there, declaring that it was impossible for him to be away from home at this juncture, dimly resentful of her going.

After all, she was only absent a bare three weeks, for she was recalled by the death of her child. She would have been no good if she had been there, and yet George felt that she ought to have been there, that in some way she was responsible.

At this time it seemed to George D'Eath that the whole foundation of his life was undermined, that nothing could ever be worth anything again. He took his son's death badly; was amazed, almost insulted.

Apart from this great disappointment there were all sorts of minor worries, mostly connected with that deed of gift. Little Laishens was empty, and sadly in need of repair, while Charles was writing fierce letters from France disputing the responsibility for the expenses of drainage, also a very long bill for forage, which he declared to have been run up before the new arrangement was made, and which his father would have discharged without a word.

Old Colonel Helstone was anxious about his boy; also anxious as to what sort of claims a young widow might make upon him, supposing the worst should happen. He did not feel that the newly married couple had been fairly treated under that deed, and said so, laid the whole blame upon George.

Irene, fretting under any sort of restraint, had taken a flat in Cambridge near to her work, so as to have somewhere to go in her holidays and during her hours off. Catch her coming home "to be domineered over by that prig George" was what she said.

Meanwhile she insisted upon the despatch of certain articles of furniture from Dene Royal, which she declared to be hers; for where was the use of buying new furniture when she already had a fair stock.

After all, her claim was modest enough, and Dene Royal was so full of furniture that nothing would have been missed had it not happened that George's own favourite arm-chair, the one in which he always sat at afternoon tea, happened to be among the articles claimed by his sister; while no words can convey the sense of irritation which overcame him each time he entered the drawing-room and saw another chair in its place.

Peggy was always grumbling, her new frocks were of little use to her as George insisted upon mourning—"So silly for a child of that age; I'm sure it's much better out of this rotten old world!"—and now he would not give her any more because he declared that he must economise. She could have got round her father-in-law, who saw through her; she could not get round her husband, who had preconceived ideas of his wife as she naturally would be because she was his.

After a while he forgot the horror of that night when his son was born; almost forgot the child itself, who had not been a real child, merely an heir; too immature for any individuality, unless it might have been to a mother's eye. He and his wife were young; they would have more children.

He had said as much to Peggy, and she had not answered, only looked at him with a peculiarly cool and calculating air.

Sometimes, walking about the place, busy with his eternal plans for the future, that look of his wife's would return to him with a sense of rather sickening chill. If anyone had suggested such an idea to him he would have pooh-poohed it with scorn, but in his heart of hearts he knew that Peggy did not intend to have any more children.

On one such occasion, which came right on the top of a tiresome difficulty with old Cherry, he almost wished

his father back again. After all, it did not seem as though he were likely to get much save trouble and worry out of his inheritance.

"I wonder what the old fellow's doing now." He actually thought that, and no mere words can ever express how much this meant, the comparative imagination involved.

For, of course, Mr. D'Eath was in Nauheim taking the waters. They had already had one letter from him, would have had more save for the war.

CHAPTER XIX

SUSIE'S holidays began on the second of August that year. Feeling in the school ran high during the last few days of term; prize-giving and speech day dropped to their proper level of silliness. "Twaddle!" that was Susie's pronouncement on the speech of the titled personage, an ex-Colonial Governor, who was to give away those books which no one ever read.

In some ways it was an advanced school. The girls were expected to know something of foreign affairs; the *Morning Post* was studied with the help of an atlas each day. In addition to this, they had a debating club and a mock parliament.

There were two German girls there. They had always been unpopular, and now might have become ostracised had it not been for Susie's intervention. "What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?" that was what she said. All Germans were gobblers; no wonder they wanted to snap up Serbia—"darling, brave little Serbia!" "The other Great Powers were idiots not to have seen what they were after." With a few of the other older girls Susie had made a sort of cult of the Balkans; anyhow and always, she was an ardent champion of the oppressed.

One of the governesses escorted her and several other pupils as far as London. There Susie joined up with Rosie, her mother and elder sister, and a brother, Leonard, from Sandhurst. They were all to travel down to Cromer together, and had an hour or so to spare in town. The girls needed bathing gowns, and Leonard must see his tailor—to self-absorbed youth there was something pleasant in the very sound of the words "my tailor."

The whole place was posted over with placards announc-

ing the general mobilisation of the German and Austrian forces, naval and military. It seemed to Susie, who did not know London very well, that it was more alive than it had ever been before.

They had meant to lunch at one of Appenrodt's shops, but they would not, for they were German, and the Germans were behaving like pigs. Mrs. Craven did not think it mattered, because, after all, the potato salad and coffee at Appenrodt's were better than anywhere else. But she gave in, as she always did. It was her boast that she and her children were on terms of perfect equality, that they treated her exactly like one of themselves; as a matter of fact, they treated her as any sixth form boy treats a kid in the junior—with a mixture of condescension and disregard.

The whole party was immensely excited over the prospect of war.

"By Gad!" cried Susie, "I hope that we'll be in it—have a smack at 'em."

Rosie's elder sister, who could afford to be more proper than her mother, found fault with her. Really "Gad" was the same as God, and not the thing.

But Susie—who had caught the phrase from old Roger Colburn—would not retract; declared that was what she meant. Her blue eyes were blazing with excitement, her face flushed.

"If we're to believe what we're taught He's 'sniffing the battle from afar,' now, at this very moment!" she said; upon which Rosie's brother, who had felt afraid she might be only a silly kid, laughed approvingly.

There were boys selling Union Jacks in the street, and she bought one, stuck it in the buttonhole of her blue serge coat, moved with a swing which was martial.

Driving in an open taxi to Liverpool Street, the crowd around the Royal Exchange, all through the thickly packed streets of that mysterious city, thrilled her. It was not only the beginning of the holidays; it was the beginning of Life—with a big "L." Not for anything would she

ever go back to school again; she would go to the Balkans and nurse wounded heroes. "What's the good of wasting your time mugging over things that are over and done with, when everything in our own world's happening all at once?", that was what she asked, playing up to Rosie's brother who declared she was a sport, and no mistake about it.

They stayed in lodgings in Cromer. And what a place it was for youth, once war had been declared. There was the continuous coming and going of troops, bands, cheering, spy scares, ambulance classes; more men than Susie had ever seen in her life. All this combined with sunshine and a fine fresh wind, yellow sand, cliffs, coves, the scarlet of poppies everywhere. Such a bounty of colour; one did not miss the red coats at Cromer! The poppies themselves were like regiments. At least, that was what youth thought, said. There were others who could not bear to look at them, who had visions of yet other fields blazoned with a dreadful gules. But they said nothing, for no one likes to be accused of unnecessary pessimism. That is, indeed, one grievance which youth has against old age: its disillusions, the way it knows and knows that it knows, spoils other people's pleasure by its very look of knowing—"Oh, all that will soon pass"—even if it says nothing.

The whole of Cromer pulsed with youth and ardour. Rosie's brother made love to Susie and taught her to smoke. At first she thought him wonderful, and very kind. But in a couple of days he was replaced by a real lieutenant staying in the same hotel, who took her out in his side-car.

They danced every night, and every day they rolled bandages. They gave pennies to the little boys who marched the streets with paper helmets and tin cans for drums. They sang and whistled and flung words of command at each other, lived in a world of restless excitement and noise, feeling very important. For, of course, it was the young who counted now, the young to whom the nation looked. Words cannot express the contempt felt for the

"dug-outs," the elderly, slow, deeply apprehensive people, all alike accused of "cold feet." When they talked of their own youth they were ridiculous, simply ridiculous; there never had been anything like youth before.

Only, each morning, as they read over the lists of the killed and wounded, were the young people awed, for a moment or two, into silence.

Sometimes there were dreadfully personal touches. The names of boys whom Leonard and the other young men had known at school; and not only "the bloods," but dull, spotty boys who had never seemed of any special importance—so suddenly, culminatively, important and apart.

Always it seemed to Susie D'Eath that the same thing happened with these lists—which, sparse as they were at the beginning, seemed worse than anything which came later, because so almost unbelievably strange—a sudden pause in her heart's beat, a pause in life itself. It was like putting on dark smoked glasses in the middle of a brilliantly sunny day.

But very soon the high wave of excitement swept them all off their feet once more. It seemed, indeed, as though youth were acquiring a new avidity for its roses, its crowns; there was something reckless and hectic in its pleasures. Rosie's sister became engaged during the first fortnight to a youth whom she had never seen before. It appeared to the two younger girls that the greater number of the girls who had left school no more than a couple of years earlier were either engaged or actually married.

"Young people will be young people," said Mrs. Craven, and yet that did not explain it. She herself had not married until she was eight-and-twenty. Her mother had married at seventeen. It was, superficially regarded, a swing of the pendulum. But those young marriages had not been like these; in those days there was no other career possible to a girl.

It seemed that at the back of all their minds was some desire to get everything there was out of life, some pre-

monition of loss. With the boys it was different; they were less avid, but they, too, had harked back. Like their grandfathers, though they would not have owned to it for worlds, they wished to be the fathers of children; while deeper still, quite unguessed at, lay an instinct for the preservation of their race as a whole.

Susie D'Eath was to stay a month at Cromer, then Rosie was going home with her for the remainder of the holidays. That was the arrangement.

At the end of a little over three weeks, however, something happened, and the war came sharply home to her with the thought of her father.

There was a letter in the paper dwelling on the probable sufferings of English civilians in Germany; she caught sight of the word "Nauheim," and it seemed that her heart stopped; she must go back to Dene Royal, see what they were doing.

She would not wait for Rosie; Rosie could follow later. As a matter of fact, she did not know that she would be able to do with her at all. She was perfectly indifferent to Rosie herself, to Rosie's mother who had been so kind to her, to Rosie's brother and sister, to the lieutenant and his friends. She had but one thought, and that was for her father.

She made so light of the journey to town, of the long drive in a taxi from Liverpool Street to the Great Western station, that they would scarcely have thought of finding her an escort had it not been that a certain Major Gilbey was going up by the same train.

Mrs. Craven was relieved. She had a boundless belief in the capacity of the rising generation to look after itself —almost overdid the responsibility which she allowed to rest upon young shoulders—but still Susie was not her own daughter, and Major Gilbey was a nice, sensible, middle-aged man. If he had not been middle-aged it is probable that he would not have kissed Susie in the first tunnel, and had his ears well boxed for his pains.

"Now," said Susie, with her merciless tongue, staring at his reddened face when they emerged into the light of day, "I know what is meant by senile decay!" She gave a little gesture of disgust. Leonard had kissed her good-bye, but he had smelt so nice and fresh of soap and youth. Major Gilbey—or so Susie declared later—smelt all musty, of stale smoke and middle age, while the quality of his kiss was altogether "beastly."

It was a long journey even after Paddington was reached, and she had only threepence left over from her fare, so that she could not afford a tea-basket or the telegram she had meant to send to Mary. Mrs. Craven had respected her independence so excessively that she had not ventured to inquire after her finances.

It was just on eight when the train reached Cottingham, and nearly half-past before, by means of promises and entreaties, Susie prevailed upon a cabman to take her up all those hills to Dene Royal; though she explained that she was only eight stone, and there was no luggage. She had taken her box on the cab to Paddington, and there it vanished. It might have been put on another train, or it might have been left behind; she did not know what had happened to it, did not greatly care. She could not imagine that she would ever bother about clothes again; all that was past, done with once for all.

The drive seemed as though it would never come to an end. If Susie had been possessed of means wherewith to pay the man she would have given it up half way and walked; but she was chained to the grumbling old cabby, his broken-kneed, spavined horse.

It was past ten when she reached Dene Royal, rang the bell, told the astonished Collins to pay the cabman—"and have done with him, for the Lord's sake"—then tumbled, dishevelled, dirty, dead tired into the drawing-room, where Peggy was picking out tunes upon the piano, and Mary sitting close under the lamp busy with some sewing. The luxury of the room, the freshness of the flowers, the order, the peace sawed across Susie's frayed

nerves, though she could scarcely have said what she expected.

George and Harold came in from the smoking-room. What in the world had happened? Why was she there? Why had she not sent a telegram? Was it true that she had been so silly as to promise the cabman a sovereign? What train had she come by? They overwhelmed her with questions and reproaches. In her fatigue and irritation she flew at them, snapping right and left. She felt herself like Fly, the fox terrier, with the rats at threshing time: pouncing on them and their silly-billy questions, shaking them, throwing them aside.

"What about father? I want to know about father. Oh, what the blazes does all that matter? Tell me what you have heard about father—is he all right?"

"Father, my dear Susie! Father's at Nauheim; surely I wrote, I——"

"I know, I know!" she stamped with impatience. "Good heavens! Don't you ever read the papers? This morning's paper—didn't you see it?"

"I haven't had a moment to look at the paper; but there wasn't anything very particular, was there? I would have heard——" began Mary, looking round at the others with her pleasant smile. Susie was dreadfully difficult, tiresome, but there was no use in allowing her to upset the entire household.

"You're hysterical, my dear Susie," put in George; "the best thing for you is to go to bed and—— What's that, Collins? 'The young lady promised him a sovereign!' Nonsense, and in these days too! I shouldn't think of it. Ten shillings, that's the proper fare."

"There you are!" cried Susie, "haggling about a beastly cab fare! Isn't that just like you! Now, look here, did you or didn't you read the paper?"

"Of course I read the paper."

"Then you saw about the civilians in Germany, the way they're being treated; you saw about Nauheim! And yet you can stand there—you—you—and argue about a

cabman. And Mary with her stupid sewing, and Peggy in a silly Juliet cap. Everything all going on just the same, and him shut up there—tortured and starved! I can tell you I know what Germans are; there were two of them at our school, they don't care for anything or anybody. They're—they're exactly like *you*, that's what they are! And I couldn't say anything worse. Going on as if nothing had happened!"

"My dear Susie," interposed Harold, who believed himself to have a way with young people, inclined to mild jocularity. "What did you expect us to be doing? Sackcloth and ashes are out of fashion in these days, you know. We're more practical, more robust."

"You're silly, heartless fools," said Susie rudely, "and that's all there is to you!"

CHAPTER XX

It was seldom, indeed, that D'Eath penetrated as far as the West End during those first weeks in Wapping. For one thing, his days became increasingly full. Sometimes he would awake in the morning with that old feeling that there was nothing which really mattered for him to do; then one thing after another would crop up. O'Hagan would need him, or Nurse Fenton, or the girl who helped her—a tall, slim creature with appealing eyes, a mocking mouth, the coolest brain and steadiest nerve imaginable—would come to him for help, the delivery of some message, the support of some damaged limb which required dressing; above all, the soothing of some hysterical or quarrelsome patient, in which he seemed to have acquired a certain knack.

The two women used to praise him by saying—"Some day you'll be a second Sergeant MacCann," referring to a raw-boned, seemingly phlegmatic police sergeant, who was a famous arbitrator in all matrimonial and semi-matrimonial disputes, common referee, comforter, backer.

D'Eath had met the man several times, and wondered at the reputation which he had achieved, until one day he saw how, when a tiny child running across the road stumbled and fell, MacCann ran to pick it up, stooped his lank person and impressed a kiss on either dirt-engrained palm; then took his own handkerchief to the blood-stained knees.

After this he took to studying the police sergeant, weighing his influence and personality in relation to those with whom he had to deal; realised how the man's stolidity, his slowness, his patience acted upon their irritable nerves, their chronic suspicions.

For D'Eath, during those early days, the people seemed like a race apart from those to whom he was accustomed. Their very language, racy as it was, hardly expressed the diversity between their traditions—and these were as many, as complicated as those of "the county"—their point of view, their ideas on every subject.

At first he regarded them broadly, as one does regard a hitherto unknown people. It was weeks before he began to realise them as individuals, to differentiate; but with this more intimate knowledge came the utter collapse of any idea of Socialism as it then stood; for surely there could be no community, in the whole world, amongst whom individualism was more rampant.

It was odd how, during those first weeks, he saw the population of Eastern London in colour. Looking back he remembered that he had seen the country people in much the same way, though he had not thought of it then, when he was so near to them; his own class as a dullish red, brighter in youth, inclining more and more to maroon as the years went on; the others—like Yeld—the colour of the earth which they tilled.

Here in Wapping there was very little actual black or white. If there was black it appeared more as space than anything else, like the coal-boxes among the stars; where the blackness was most felt there was nothing actually to be seen or known, though the whole effect was one of terror. For the rest he saw the riverside people done in drabs, with threads of orange and scarlet, and here and there the gleam of pure gold—as in 'Rene Phillips, adulteress as she was.

The women interested him most. They were extraordinarily lenient with the men. They did not condemn drunkenness; they suffered personal cruelty with a sort of pride; they stood by crooks and cut-throats. But soppiness, softness of any kind, they could not and would not abide.

Many of them were just hussies, immoral, so far as standard morality went; dishonest, dirty, with no idea of how to cook a decent meal, set a straight stitch, keep a

house, or even one room, clean; noisy, brawling, slovenly, sly. They were nearly all this—if by chance any one of them was clean likely enough she was a shrew. But they were more than this. They were amazingly loyal to their mankind, to their neighbours, friends. It was seldom, indeed, that either man or woman gave anyone away, even an enemy. Their kindness and generosity were beyond words.

And yet there was but little gratitude shown or expressed; everything was taken for granted. Even when it was a question of Treherne going to the war it was difficult to say whether the people really cared for him, or were merely jealous of what they had grown to consider as their rights.

In that district, indeed, it was only when a man was dead that it became possible to say for how much he had counted. And even then only if he were given a plain, "dry" funeral.

D'Eath had seen 'Rene Phillips more than once, meeting her by appointment at the tea-shop; while one Sunday she came down to tea with him and Treherne at the house on the Pier head.

He would not risk going to her Piccadilly stand. For one thing, it would have spoiled everything if he had been seen and recognised. For another the very sight of that London which had once been all he knew of the great patchwork conglomeration of contradictions, of the West-End people with that smooth, suave outline, that calm, assured movement, that blank and bland gaze which has been caught up by hotel and club porters, shop assistants, servants, prostitutes—giving a superficial resemblance to all West-End faces, quite apart from the North, the East; above all, the South—would have brushed away something of the fine, ardent sense of adventure which had come to him, with the realisation of being completely detached from everything which had gone before.

It was, indeed, like some of the long past, make-believe, dreams of childhood come true. The great dream common

to all children with imagination of being deliberately lost; so disguised as to be unrecognisable even to oneself. There was even that 'fascinating tang' of piracy about it, which no man who has ever been a real boy quite outgrows; more particularly at night, when the rats slipped from their lairs, and the electric launch of the river police, with its one gleaming eye, slid silently in and out of the dark hulks which hung along the river wall. When there were deep, black gaps of silence, broken by an occasional shriek zig-zagging like lightning across them; when all sorts of strange things fell into the river, with a splash which caught at the heart, and were, or were not, fished out again; when there were robberies of truly piratical magnitude, high-laden barges drawn away from their anchorage, stripped to the last spar, and left swinging against some distant steps at the further side of the river. To read the police notices of losses, robberies, the offers of rewards, was enough—cargoes of copper, oil, spices, fruit, bales of paper, all gone at a sweep.

One day he encountered 'Rene Phillips by chance upon the top of a bus somewhere east of St. Paul's. She was not on her direct route home, and he wondered where she was going until he saw that she had a spotted toy-horse in her basket, negligently overlaid with a few half-faded flowers.

She realised his glance in a moment and flushed hotly. "It's fur the kid; I thought as 'ow I'd leave it artside the door. 'E don't not never seem ter 'ave anyfink ter plye wiv, pore little devil!" she said. Then, as though something in D'Eath's glance hurt her, she added: "No, I be darned if I do!" and pressed the toy upon a small boy sitting with his mother upon the seat in front of them. "Sorter dreamt I 'ad a kid!" she said, "but it ain't come true, though our lan'lord's cat 'as kittened."

It must have been after this—as she had spoken of leaving the spotted horse outside the door—that her acquaintance with her successor to Alf's affections, the lumpy bed, ripened; for one day she said, quite suddenly,

à propos of nothing that had gone before: "It can walk. Though it didn't orter, its legs is that bandy. It luks for all the world as if it 'ud been put too close ter the fire an' warped. But it knows me fine."

"Do you speak to it?" By this time D'Eath's mind was accustoming itself to leap from one subject to another, to relinquish that chewing habit of the country-side.

"Well! wotcher think? An' it's Ma too. I tells yer strite she may luk like a kipper, but she's a real lidy fur all that. I was tellin' 'er the wye as Alf likes 'is toasted cheese, wiv a dash o' beer an' no end o' mustid. Oh, yus, she's a lidy, an' she knows 'ow ter treat a lidy," added Mrs. Phillips, with a toss of her head in the direction of that particular waitress who had attended to them the very first day they had tea together, and whose presence acted as a continual challenge to the flower-seller. The very way in which she smoothed down her white be-starched and frilled apron was enough; the difference between that apron and the other woman's—coarse, clean, ample, in some odd way maternal—was of itself sufficient to explain the reason of this antagonism.

'Rene had not lost flesh, she was smooth and rosy as ever, but there was a strained look in her fine dark eyes, a restlessness. For a day or so she had thought of taking up with yet another man in Alf's place, but it did not come to anything; not that she "minded him," but she could not "seem ter settle to him," or that was what she told D'Eath.

"I'm off men, that's a fack!" she declared. "Asides, I don't know what blokes are comin' too. This chap now as I was a-tellin' yer of; in general 'e's not forrard enuff, an' then when 'e *is* forrard 'e gets on tikin' liberties. No moderation in nuffin', an' no guts to 'em neither."

Then late one evening O'Hagan came up to the sitting-room and told D'Eath that there was a lady downstairs wanting to speak to him.

It was 'Rene Phillips. The night was hot, but she wore her shawl dragged tightly around her with the tragic

air of a Roman toga. She looked unfinished, one-sided, shorn, and D'Eath could not understand why until he realised that he had never before seen her without her basket. The nights were drawing in a little, and the gas flickered in the hallway—one meagre jet amid all that stately panelling—showing the girl's face white, swollen with tears, and with dark rings beneath the eyes. She wore no hat, and her heavy plaits of hair hung low on either cheek.

"I want that there doctor o' yourn," she said hoarsely; "that there kid o' Alf's——"

"What is it, my dear child, what is it?"

"Pneumony, so the doctor says, but 'e ain't no good, no class. Besides, they don't not *all* die o' pneumony, I tells 'er that, but she's scared a-cause o' mine. It ain't got nuffin' ter do wiv Alf neiver, so I tells 'er; but she's fair off Alf, thinks o' nuffin' but the kid."

"You've been there?"

"All day an' arf las' night." She gave an impatient movement, glancing upwards. "That there doctor o' yourn——"

D'Eath ran upstairs, and Treherne came down in a moment. The fact that there was another doctor with the child did not trouble him. He was "a friend of the family." He had a way of saying this, with a grin, of all his East-End patients; and, indeed, unless you were a "friend of the family," knew something of its capacity in the way of brains, time, money, what was to be done?

They went off, the three of them, together. More than once 'Rene had shown an intimate knowledge of the neighbourhood, and D'Eath now realised the reason for this: her old home lay within a mile of the river.

Up Nightingale Lane they went, along Leman Street and Christian Street, through indescribable alleyways, round corners, over greasy cobbled pavements—every now and then stepping aside to avoid some recumbent figure propped against a wall, half in, half out of the gutter, some lurching drunken sailor or brawling woman. 'Rene Phillips slid by

them all alike without a glance, her shawl drawn up over her head; it was evident from her sureness of line that she was familiar with every step of the way.

At last they came to a street of narrow, more or less respectable, four-storied houses, and she mounted the steps of one of these, passed in with a backward beckoning gesture—even here the hall door was wide open, or altogether gone—then upstairs to the third floor, where she opened another door, and looked back, beckoning again.

The room which Treherne and D'Eath entered was a combined sitting-room and kitchen, meagre, tidy, and very clean; the walls a careful patchwork of a paper-hanger's samples.

Only opposite to the door was a bare space, while a number of flowered china jugs and other crockery stood upon the floor.

"The chiffonier 'ad ter go," whispered 'Rene. "It's all very well fur Asquiff ter keep on sying bizness as usual, but it ain't true, not o' plummin' any wye. It seems as folks can't not do wiffout doctors, but they can wiffout drains, at least that Alf's experience, ain't it, Alf? This is Alf," she added; then, "Mr. Alfred Phillips, Mr. D'Eath —Mr. Alfred Phillips, Doctor Treherne."

A short, depressed-looking man who was sitting by the gas-stove, leaning one arm upon it, his head on his hand, glanced up, bowed majestically.

D'Eath's first impression was one of amazement at the smallness of this demagogue, this defier of kings. The chair was a high one, but even so his shoulders were raised, his elbow was strained up to the level of the stove. For all that, unshaven, red-eyed, squinting, undersized as he was, there was something about the set of the jaw, the squinty, sidelong stare, which proclaimed a man who would be master in his own house.

"Pleased ter meet yer," he said; "pleased ter meet any friend o' me wife's"—here he paused, then added, meditatively, "so ter speak. Won't yer tike a seat?"

His sharp, anxious little eyes slid off at a tangent from one to another; it was evident that he knew in a moment which was the doctor.

Treherne and 'Rene passed through to an inner room, and D'Eath sat down on the chair indicated to him by Mr. Phillips, who had not risen from his seat.

Directly opposite to him was the space formed by the doorway of the bedroom, like a picture in a dark oblong frame.

The room in which he sat was almost dark, lighted by one candle; in contrast with this the inner room with its paraffin lamp appeared to be brilliantly illuminated. There was a large tumbled bed and something very small, above which the two women stooped, lying in it: the one woman all curves, the other sharply angular. Across the end of the bed hung a pair of trousers and a towel; there was a spotted horse tethered to it with a piece of string. "So she bought another," thought D'Eath.

Through the silence of the room sounded a heavy, gasping breath. It was not continuous. There was a struggle, then a sudden race; another struggle; another galloping race. It was almost impossible to associate the sound with that tiny mound upon the bed; would have seemed as reasonable to credit it to the account of the wooden horse shaking its head loose, galloping across the cobbles outside, jibbing, plunging, rearing, and then galloping off again.

Treherne and the other doctor, a pale, very young man, had drawn a little apart; they were not even speaking, simply standing looking down at the bed.

D'Eath wondered why they did not do something. The sound of that agonised breathing was almost beyond bearing. He glanced at his companion, and saw that Mr. Phillips also hung upon that open door; one hand across his mouth, strained and anxious.

"Proper mix up, that's wot it is," he whispered hoarsely, each word detached as though some instinct impelled him to keep in time with the harsh, rattling breath. "Them

two women——" He broke off, both men rose to their feet. For what seemed like an eternity the sound ceased. To D'Eath it was as though someone had taken hold of his heart, held it tight.

Then it began again, quicker, more difficult.

"Gawd, that give me a turn!" breathed Alf. Neither man moved, it had become almost impossible for them to draw their own breath.

There was another break, and once more it appeared as though they were hung in space.

Alf raised his hand to his forehead and glanced curiously at his fingers, glistening with sweat. Then, as the dreadful sound began again, muttered something to the effect that 'Rene's kid had gone the same way. "I'm sure I don't know why. There weren't never nuffin' amiss wiv me," he urged distractedly; while it was evident from his words, from what 'Rene herself said, that there had been some confused talk of heredity.

He opened and shut his strong hands, looking at them curiously, with a sort of pathos, squared his shoulders, and glanced down sideways at his own short, thick-set person as though endeavouring to understand where the weakness lay.

Once more the laboured breath ceased. But it now seemed as though they were able to regard the pause with equanimity. Of course, it would begin again.

For what seemed a long while they waited in certainty, almost calm: found no meaning in the fact that Treherne had moved forward and touched 'Rene on her shoulder, while the other woman sank down by the side of the bed, her face hidden in her hands; still waited, stupidly endeavouring to hold their own breath until that ominous, and yet longed for, sound should begin again. Then very slowly it dawned upon them that the two doctors were speaking together, scarcely lowering their voices; that 'Rene had sunk down beside her companion, her arm around her; that there was a murmur of voices, a sound of sobbing, and yet withal a dreadful blank of silence,

through which Alf's breath came with a sudden rushing hiss.

After a moment or two the young doctor went away. Treherne followed him into the other room; then 'Rene came, with the lamp in one hand, her arm around the mother, who sat down slackly upon the edge of that little sofa of which her predecessor had been so proud, holding her apron to her face.

"There weren't not never a cuter kid," cried 'Rene, kneeling by her side, the tears streaming unchecked down her cheeks. "Nor a prettier, neiver." She paused a moment, and added: "Not never—not at a year old, anywye. The pore little duck!"

She was kneeling straight up; the other woman, shaken by anguished sobs, had laid her head against her breast, and she rocked her to and fro as she spoke, with odd little murmuring sounds in between her words.

"There, there, there. Listen 'ere now. I'll go ter the market ter-morrer early an' get 'im such a wreath as never was; all them big white lilies. Come, now, 'e'll like that, the pretty little dear."

"If 'e 'ad wot 'e was most set on ter 'is buryin' it 'ud be that there 'oss as yer giv' 'im."

"There ain't no nuffin' as I wouldn't 'ave given im!"

"Well, yer couldn't 'a' bin more kinder, not if 'e wos yer own, an' that's wot 'e orter 'a' been," sobbed the other woman. Then—"Oh, dearie, dearie, whatever shall I do wivout 'im. I wish I wos dead, along o' 'im! I wish I wos dead, that I do!"

"Gawd!" said 'Rene, staring straight in front of her with white set face, "don't I jes' know wot ut feels loike. But there, my dear, there now, there, there——"

The lamp went out with a sudden pop; the candle, low in its socket, wavered and flickered.

"Wot abart a bit o' supper?" began Alf, with sudden decision. But the two women, clinging together, took no notice of him, back in his old place by the gas-stove:

did not even look up when D'Eath and Treherne slipped from the room.

For some time there was silence between the two men, slowly and dubiously threading the tangle of narrow streets. Then Treherne gave that short laugh for which D'Eath had grown accustomed to listen when he was in any way moved.

"The rivals!"

"I can't understand it! In our class those two women would not even be on speaking terms."

"Well, ordinarily it would be the same here, to all practical purposes—though there would be talking enough and to spare, and more than words. But that flower-girl of yours is different, so different that she makes the other woman different too. Women like that do not belong to any class, any race, but to those thrice blessed exceptions who always do the one thing you could never even have thought of. She's the complete primitive woman, plus a sense of humour and fair play; at least one might say so if any sort of classification were possible. The interesting thing now will be to see which of the two is left in possession of Alf."

For a week or more they speculated at odd moments on the adjustment of that bizarre household. D'Eath saw nothing of 'Rene. More than once he thought of venturing as far as Piccadilly, finding out what had happened; but he refrained, for her sake as well as his own. It was best to leave the girl alone, to allow affairs to take their own course, which in the end proved to be one which neither he nor Treherne had as much as thought of; and here 'Rene justified herself, her persistent diversion from the ordinary, for one Sunday she and the "Kipper" came in state to call.

Alf had joined the Army, and they had set up house together.

A few days later, when D'Eath encountered 'Rene on her way home, smiling and friendly, she explained her reason for being earlier than usual. "I told Maudie as

I'd be back afore six. She an' I are goin' ter tike that there blinkin' mattress ter pieces an' tease up the flock. Lord! ter think o' the months an' months as I'd set my 'eart on that there job, an' then went clean off it, in a manner o' speakin'. But it's goin' ter be done na. Old Alf will find everyfing slap up ter the mark when 'e comes marchin' 'ome, wiv flags flyin', an' no mistike abart it neiver."

CHAPTER XXI

LIFE at Dene Royal was not going smoothly. To George the whole thing seemed so inexplicable that it almost—not quite—depressed him into thinking less of himself. More than once he wished that his father were back again. In a vague way he began to think more kindly of the man he had counted out since he was a cocksure boy of fifteen; earlier indeed, from the time that he first began to show that smug, rather sanctimonious complacency and snobbery which was part of the more luxurious preparatory school atmosphere of twenty years ago—evidence of a violent reaction against the hardships of an earlier day—when miniature Conservatives in Eton suits were brought up to believe that life ran on for ever in certain well-padded grooves for themselves and their kind.

He had always been at enmity with Irene, but still, because she was so much quicker than he was—so decided, however wrong—the things which she said stuck in his mind, influenced his thoughts; and Irene's verdict respecting her father had been—"Of course, he is a dear in his own way, but that is not enough in these days; what is needed is character, efficiency."

George believed himself to be possessed, in a very large measure, of both; and yet, by some means or other, that inefficient father of his had managed to keep things going, and in smooth working order, with a facility which was beyond him.

Of course, nothing was done exactly as it should be, but a dreadful doubt as to whether this was ever to be hoped for overcame George at times; in addition to this, there was evidence that his father had been robbed right and left. And yet there had always appeared to be plenty of

money, was no quarrelling, no complaints as now. "I suppose they imagine that they can play up with me, just as they like," he thought resentfully: feeling young and crude for the first time in his life, as he battled against the stolid, silent wall of opposition which confronted him at every step; more particularly exemplified by his complete failure to prevent a recent short cut across the best pasture land on the Home Farm from developing into a right of way.

It was all very well to talk of bringing an action; he tried that once. But one can't go on for ever bringing actions against one's own people—frightened-eyed, but obstinate children, bland and cringing old women, daily workers coming and going from their jobs.

They made a hole in the fence at one point, which was mended again and again; again and again broken through. Cherry said: "Best put a stile and have done with it. Those new quarries on the hillside have altered things; the women and children take the men's dinners that way, it saves them close on a mile."

"I be hanged if I do anything of the sort," answered George; he was always hot and overbearing with the old agent who had fagged his own father at school, and who was as slow, hard to turn, as the dark, heavy tilth of the uplands. "If I once put a stile, gave in to them, there would be no end to what they imagined that they could force me into doing. It would be a fatal weakness."

"Still, at times, it's best to float with the stream. If a thing does not matter very much, if it's more trouble to stop it than to let it go on."

"'Umph, that's just it! Look here, Cherry, I don't want to be rude—no one appreciates you, faithfulness and all that, more than I do—but this sort of *laissez-faire* policy has been the ruin of this place, and there's got to be an end to it. One must move with the times." George was fond of saying that, meaning that no one else must be allowed to move, constituting himself the policeman of the age in Laishens. "One can't go on for ever in the

old haphazard way; things have got to be kept up to the mark in these days of competition. And a field like that, all trodden over by indiscriminate footpaths, is so much dead waste; likely enough we'll be breaking it up next year, and then what will happen? The best thing is to give you my explicit orders; then no one can come down on you, if that's what you're afraid of. The first person who is caught breaking through that fence has got to be prosecuted. Now, that's flat! Once for all, I'll have no more of it."

"You can't prosecute your own people."

"I can prosecute them, and I will prosecute them!" declared George.

"Well, you know, just now, with this war and all——" began Cherry in his slow, rambling way.

"I can see no reason why this war should upset all the rights of personal property. On the contrary, at a time like this, it is more necessary than ever to enforce law and order. However, there you have my wishes, and Davies too. You can both put all the blame of it on me, my shoulders are broad enough to bear it."

Touching his finger to his hat, George rode off, very well groomed, very upright. He had spoken with literal exactness; his shoulders were broad, almost too squarely broad. It seemed to Cherry, sitting loosely with long stirrups, in his old greenish-grey tweeds, on his rough grey cob, that there was something stiff, unpliable, in young D'Eath's seat; a lack of oneness—though he had ridden from his childhood—between himself and his mount. He could manage it, had it well in hand; but he managed it like a machine—as he thought to manage Laishens and Dene Royal.

In his own room that evening—a comfortable, untidy room, littered with papers, books, fishing tackle—sitting over a glowing eye of wood fire, trying to read the *Mark Lane Express*, the agent's mind went back again to George—his master now; though only nominally, for one is powerless to master what one cannot change.

Young George was making trouble for himself. There would be nothing so dramatic as open revolt, but there would be endless difficulties set in the way of everything he wished to do, a persistent disregard of his wishes. He regarded Cherry as being hopelessly behind the times. Cherry himself realised this perfectly, but he also realised that he was moving with the times far more surely than George himself. Moving as the people themselves moved, in a slow, hidden way like the germ of life in the buried seed.

George was bent on treating his tenants and workpeople in the way all the D'Eaths, up to his father's time, had treated them since the Enclosures Act; as something between idiot children, personal possessions, and enemies. He talked largely of his experiences in diplomacy, of the knowledge and tact necessary for a man who has anything to do with the handling of European Policy. Cherry had a shrewd idea that George had been a failure in his profession, a man does not so easily give up a career in which he knows himself to be at his best. For all that he was fond of telling his agent that he must learn to take a broader view of life, not allow himself to be brought to a pause by trifles—"All this, you know, is so simple in comparison with what I've been used to," he would say. "Once get a working plan, stick to it, and a place of this sort ought to run itself."

Always George visualised himself as the model landowner, with the best run property, the best shooting, the neatest village in the district He saw *himself,* as so many people do. But the mirror of his mind was not large enough to contain others; and if you see only yourself, out of relation to the rest of the world, you are blind for all practical purposes.

That little knot of people whom he regarded as part of his inheritance, small in actual number and yet so strong because they were necessary, because they were united and had the habit of silence, who were moving along with the rest of the world—perhaps more surely because more slowly—were outside of his calculations; save as a certain

sized block which only needed a little compression to be perfectly fitted into the careful parquetry of his life.

Of course he was right about that footpath, steadily wearing itself into a permanency, the sanctity of his fences. He was always right, too right, too eminently reasonable.

It was just his ill-fortune that the very first person caught hacking his way, with a knife—literally with a knife—through the freshly laid and woven screen of blackthorn, then stamping it down with his heavy hobnailed boots, should have been old Sam Oxley; and this on the very day when "owd Jim" had finished his training, gone out to France to replace his son.

Sam was had up before the magistrates. There was no conviction; George would not have pressed for one. During the Sunday which intervened he had felt a curious sense of shame when, in standing up to read the first lesson, he realised that the long black line of Oxleys—which ever since that funeral sermon had remained faithful to the church—was now conspicuous only by its absence.

Those pews had been among the best. The rightful holders of them—influential yeomen farmers—had given them up to the stricken family, the first in that district to suffer loss from the war, without a word. Now, equally without a word, they remained empty. The original occupants declared themselves to be "very comfortable" where they were. No one else would enter them, unless some stranger happened to visit the church.

One Sunday a kitchen-maid from a neighbouring house, all flustered by her own lateness, was shown into one of them, and the people stared so that she broke out all pricking with heat, giggled, wept, and finally fled down the aisle with her handkerchief to her face.

An iron hurdle was put up in place of the cut swathes of that unfortunate fence. But it was removed the same night; never seen again.

The path widened; for now, since old Sam was not convicted, the people used it openly, walking two or three abreast.

They were all quite civil to George; but they returned his greetings without a smile. The young people would move on with a swing and a shrug. More than once he caught the sound of a laugh, a muttered "Old stuck up!"

He was helpless. However much you may believe in law as a proper adjunct of order, you cannot prosecute anyone for laughing. The older people took another, subtler line; they were more accustomed to being kept under, and there is no under-dog, however stupid in most ways, who has not his own subtle cunning, his own malice.

They would pass him with that bland, bovine gaze, finger to the forelock or half curtsy. Then turn and ask after his father.

"Eh, dear, you must be in a turruble taekin' about the poor gentleman fur sure. Out there among them there 'eathens. Like enuff 'e saw owd Jim's Jim shot an' all. Dearie, dear, such a kind gentleman as never was. Well, well, 'tain't likely as we'll ever come across the likes o' 'im again. It dawn't not seem loike the saeme place now since 'e do be gone."

The promiscuous gathering of firewood—which included the breaking off of dead boughs, taking toll of hedgerows—was forbidden. There were printed notices to that effect. But it still went on. The cottagers were told that they must not keep lodgers, but they still kept them. No one could prevent them from showing hospitality to their own relations, and suddenly it seemed as though the hill quarries were entirely worked by the cousins of people in Laishens or Little Laishens. It was all very well for George to forbid the keeping of pigs save on the allotments; but he was really powerless to evict either the pigs or their owners, for agricultural labour was scarce; while in all that he ordained his sense of helplessness was augmented by the fact that everybody agreed with everything he said.

It was not only among his tenants and workpeople that this spirit of antagonism showed itself. There was the wife of his bosom; if Peggy could be called that when she set something so cold and stiff and apart between herself and

the embraces of her husband. She never once said that she did not intend to bear another child, at least not for years to come; but George was beginning to have a shamed feeling that there were certain things of which she knew more than he did. He had always been a bit of a prig, prided himself on keeping aloof from any improper talk; had taken it for granted that Peggy knew nothing when he married her, because that was the sort of girl he had always intended to marry. Of course he might still discover, any day, that she was again going to have a baby, or if she was not in that condition it might simply mean that she was not yet in her normal state of health. He told himself this, but in his heart of hearts he knew better. Knew that there were things Peggy knew—which gave her that air of cool certainty, bodily compliance—that he did not know, could not even guess at.

And even this was not the end of his troubles. At first Peggy had submitted to Mary's continued governance of the house. It would leave her free; she did not count on spending her life at Dene Royal, had visions of going abroad, taking a flat in town. The war, however, put a stop to the first of these aspirations, George put his foot down upon the other. His place, and of course her place, was at home in days such as those which had come upon them. "There's a great deal too much hysteria, running about, as it is." That was what he said, with some truth.

It was natural that after this Peggy, as she was not so foolish as to revolt openly against her husband, should revolt against Mary. It began insidiously. Peggy was never cross or defiant. But she would invite quite a number of people up from Cottingham for lunch, and then, just as they were due, apologise to "Mary darling" for having quite forgotten to tell her they were coming. If Mary spoke of asking any of the relations or family friends to stay, she would say: "Oh, but Mary darling, do you mind, not *just* that week, it's the only chance the Sittingtons have, on their way down from Scotland, and I do feel I ought to ask them. Of course they will blame poor little me if I don't!" Or

"There's my cousin, Bertie Herries, poor boy, it's his last chance before he goes out, and Teddy French coming for the flower show—I'm *so* sorry, but I *promised.*"

Mary was terribly hampered in this insidious warfare, this nibbling away at her line—which took the form of re-adjusting bedrooms and furniture, the hours of meals "only just for a day or two"—by her reputation for selflessness. Mary had always been so sweet, giving in when there was nobody to oppose her. She would lose everything if she once started fighting against her sister-in-law.

George could not have said what was wrong. He supposed it was a case of, "Oh, you women! You're always quarrelling!" as Uncle Roger would have said.

Still, there was one little sneaking trick of Peggy's which galled him almost as much as it galled Mary. She would be arranging some gaiety, issuing some invitation, then break off suddenly and exclaim: "Oh, but I forgot! Mary, dear, do forgive me. I hope you don't mind—will it be quite convenient for you?" She would look at Mary beseechingly, then turn to her own friends and add, oh, so sweetly: "I'm no good at housekeeping, you know: my sister-in-law looks after everything. They would never trust me to do anything, poor little me. And Mary is so practical."

The tone of that "so practical" was beyond words, and Mary would feel the hot, slow colour burn into her cheeks; even George realised that this sort of thing never happened save when there were people there—people who thought Peggy was put upon because she was small, had no idea of her talent for spending her own allowance and all the housekeeping money upon clothes, and still being in debt to her dressmaker; while at no other time was Mary considered, let alone consulted, by young Mrs. D'Eath.

George was seriously put out by his wife's attitude. The cutting away of Vera's and Irene's shares from the family finances had already crippled him. If Mary set up house for herself at Suttons he did not know how he could possibly hope to carry through all his improvements.

He had an idea that the one thing was to put any matter

plainly—speak out, even to a woman; and that, upon doing this, the state of mind known as "seeing sense" must automatically result. He placed his own position very plainly before his wife. "You must keep in with Mary; I can't do without Mary," he ended by saying; then reddened under the hard innocence of his Peggy's stare, her inevitable inquiry: "My dear George, whatever have I done now?"—most often accompanied by the remark that she was sure that she was "a great deal better tempered with Mary" than he was.

This was true enough. George's temper was not what it used to be when he had nothing worse than international troubles to worry him, and he vented it on the one member of the family whom he believed that he could trust not to make a scene. He was perfectly well aware that Mary looked on his ill-humour as the result of liver, for she followed her mother's formula for all masculine aberrations by suggesting a pill. Peggy's attitude showed neither temper nor liver—besides, women were not supposed to suffer from either. George had a trick of saying "women," or "you women" in a way that was exactly like old Roger Colburn, who always declared that he would have divorced his wife if she had come down to breakfast in her dressing-gown, or opened the *Morning Post,* "messing it all up in the way you women have," before he had found time to read it.

As to Mary, for the first time in her life she was unhappy, felt herself at a disadvantage, and this alone puzzled her, made her uncomfortable. From the very beginning she had been the one to miss her father. He was part of *the* portrait of herself. She was as incomplete without him as the poseur in the early Victorian photograph without the Family Bible or album upon which to rest a negligent hand. He had served as a peg for those garlands of filial affection and self-sacrifice which it had been his delight to weave. Now, however, under the snick of her sister-in-law's honeyed malice, she began to think of him with real affection. So long as he had been there her place was secure; consideration, peace, respect, an accepted part of everyday life.

It was a pity that her letters at this time never reached her father, for they showed some realisation of him as an individual, not merely an appendage.

The fact was that she had addressed them as directed to Hugh D'Eath, Esq., c/o Mr. Whitacre, whom she innocently imagined to be the owner of the hydropathic establishment, and the super-astute German authorities—having early discovered that there was no one of the name of D'Eath staying at Nauheim—confiscated, not only them, but all the other letters arriving for, or despatched by, the unfortunate Mr. Whitacre.

In any case, even had he received those letters, D'Eath would have heard nothing of the latest worry which had overtaken the family at Dene Royal: a worry that, for a while at least, overtopped everything else—the awful, the inexplicable, the absolute disappearance of his youngest daughter at the end of the summer holidays, during her transit from home to school.

It is certain that at this time Mary was genuinely anxious to spare her father any fresh anxiety. Perhaps, in addition to this, though she did not in the least realise it—for she never thought of reproaching herself about anything. "After all, one can only do one's best," was her placid creed—her conscience felt sore regarding the attitude she had taken up respecting those holidays, the affectionate interest with which her father regarded his youngest daughter.

But let the reason be what it might, it is certain that no one of her letters touched on this new trouble; also that she had some reason to pride herself upon her reticence, for there is no doubt that they all went through a rather awful period of blank helplessness, reached a state of desperation in which, if it had not been for Aunt Caroline's firm attitude, her reiterated assertion that anything—*anything*—and even Aunt Caroline had read about the white slave traffic—was better for a young girl than to have her name made public before it reached the "a marriage has been arranged" stage, they might have appealed to the agony column of

The Times, to detectives, to Scotland Yard. As a matter of fact, George did go up to London for this last special purpose. But he was still hesitating how to put the matter in a light compatible with the dignity of the family—for though he pooh-poohed Aunt Caroline he felt exactly as she did concerning his female relations—when he received a telegram from Mary telling him that she had heard from Susie herself; that, although she gave no address, she declared herself well, and added that she did not intend to return home, let alone go back to school.

They had been really frightened for her; now they were furiously angry. The memory of all they had feared, of every telegram which had passed between Dene Royal and Susie's school—the way in which they had scanned the papers for a "found murdered" or "drowned," hung upon that twist of the drive which gave the first glimpse of a telegraph boy—enraged them. Peggy declared they would all much rather have heard that the child was dead!

"There are worse things than death," remarked Harold sententiously, and here Peggy agreed with him.

"Better be dead than bored!" That was what she said; then yawned and added that she supposed that she might as well go to bed, as there was nothing in the world to do, though it was scarcely ten o'clock.

Her small imagination was stimulated by the thought of what Susie might be "up to." She herself had no courage for adventure, was far too calculating, too fond of comfort; but she reflected, quite coolly and with relish, upon the sort of scrape in which the young girl might have become involved: felt herself thrill with an excitement which was half malice, half an envious and lascivious desire for adventure without danger.

Anyhow, apart from the fact that it amused her to see her husband and his family so put about, she was sorry that the "little spitfire," as she called Susie, had gone. There was, anyhow, some sort of life in the house so long as she was there, she thought; and truly enough that first evening when Susie came flaming back from Cromer had started an

almost unbroken series of "rows," "scenes," lasting right up to the twenty-first of September, when the holidays reached their end.

Susie had tried to infect the family with some of her own furious anxiety in regard to her father; finding that they would not be roused, her impatience, her contempt were beyond all words. When she declared that he might very well be shot as a spy, left to starve, forced to fight, George told her that those sort of things were, simply, not done: and after all he ought to know something of the Hague Convention, the position of non-combatants in the time of war; the moral code which governed Europe.

Of course in one way they were anxious about their father. Mary could not but remember what Sir Humphrey had said, and what that one letter from Nauheim had reiterated on the subject of worry and shock. But Susie's impatience had only set them the more solidly in the mould of their belief that everything would turn out all right in the end. "For God's sake do something," Susie would cry, and then the answer would come, with that admirable patience which made it so exasperating:

"My dear child, what else *can* be done?" Had not Kiddington written to a cousin of his in the Foreign Office who had promised to try and get news, and did not everyone know that public men must not be worried or fussed?

Then Mary would say: "Really, my dear Susie, one would think that you imagined you were the only one of the family to trouble about dear father; when I'm sure that we none of us think about anything else."

It is very certain that Susie was more than unreasonable. She would go out and about among the workpeople and tenants, who inflamed her with dreadful prognostications, all the more dreadful because of the stolidity of those who uttered them. Then she would come home and find the family seated round the luncheon table or having tea in the garden and—staring at them with crimson face, wide, hot blue eyes, something aggressive in the very set of her shoulders—exclaim:

"Well! Upon my word! How you *can!*"

After all, how was it possible that they should not? One cannot live without food, and it is no special sign of heartlessness to continue to have it served in the usual fashion. Nor would it have helped their father had they ceased to sleep in their beds, though that also was what Susie fell foul of—"It beats me how you can sleep in your beds thinking of him."

On the twenty-first Vera was going up to London and she took Susie with her, to the intense relief of all concerned. Susie's last words were: "I don't want ever to see the place or any one of you again until father comes home. I can stand people without brains or without heart, but people with neither are absolutely the limit!"

"She wants a good whipping and a week of bread and water, that's the only thing for her," remarked George as he turned away from the front door. They had been willing to forget and forgive, were all gathered together to see Susie off. George actually held a tip ready in his proffered hand. But Susie, very busy saying good-bye to the dogs, had not appeared to notice either him or his hand; and now he slipped the despised sovereign back into his pocket—it was all the harder because he had wondered if half would not have been quite enough in war-time. Mary's sheeplike face was blank with amazement while she hung for a moment, her hands still outstretched, her cheek proffered, as it had been for her little sister's farewell kiss. It was simply beyond her that anyone could speak as Susie had spoken, part from them in anger. It was like that dreadful "letting the sun go down upon your wrath"—which, after all, does not make life half so uncomfortable, at least for others, as getting up in a bad temper.

George hoped that no one had seen his attempt at reconciliation. But of course Peggy, who saw everything, realised in a moment what had happened.

"You needn't worry yourself, my dear," she assured him. "Susie's got something like twenty pounds on her person at the present moment. She filled up the savings

bank form more than a week ago and drew out all her money when we went into Chingford for the fish yesterday."

The mistress escorting the girls to school was timed to be at Paddington at twenty to four, half an hour before the train went out, so that she might have plenty of time to collect her charges.

Vera and her sister arrived at the station a few minutes before three. That did not give them the chance of doing anything together and yet it seemed a long time for Vera—with her long list of commissions—to sit idle in the station, merely waiting; and here Susie supported her.

"What's the good of wasting your time like that? Why can't I have some tea by myself and then stay in the waiting-room until old Mother Craig comes?" she inquired; and really there did seem nothing against it.

"Well, anyhow, send a postcard when you get there, or else Mary will be in a fuss." That was the one stipulation which Vera made; rather half-heartedly because, now that she was married, she realised how much her eldest sister had always bored her.

There was no anxiety felt at Dene Royal when the promised postcard failed to appear. Susie never had any manners, and, anyhow, she would be obliged to write on Sunday.

But on Monday there was still no word: and it was only on Tuesday, when a rather stiff letter arrived from the head-mistress—saying that she had been expecting every day to hear why Miss Susie D'Eath had not been among the girls who left Paddington by the four-ten train, as arranged, and the reason of her failure to return to school on the day specified—that the family even thought of there being anything amiss.

After this it was no wonder that the whole household at Dene Royal was in an uproar, or what corresponded to the uproar of a more exuberant class. The dreadful part of the whole affair lay in the limited amount of steps which could be taken without publicity. Even the telegrams were so guarded in tone as to be almost unintelligible. "You'll

never get anyone to marry that girl if it once comes out that she's been gadding about, all over the country, alone, or with the Lord only knows who!" declared old Roger Colburn. And though Mary said, "You forget that girls have something else to think about besides marriage nowadays, Uncle Roger," in their heart of hearts they all agreed with him.

Horace D'Eath expressed the same idea when he said, "There must be no scandal, I've got my own girls to think of!"—snorting with scorn when Harold murmured something about "not so much as a sparrow falling to the ground." He resented nothing more than his curate's habit of dragging in the Bible; besides, in this case, the quotation was so curiously in-apropos. There was no question of Susie "falling"—the very word was unfortunate—but only of what people might think. And, after all, though there might be no uncertificated death of sparrows, there was a certain soiling of doves, scarcely spoken of, but still to be reckoned with.

As to Susie herself! Well, there must be something in heredity when two members of one family, in direct succession, make up their minds so oddly and decisively not to do that which is expected of them—in fact, not to "go to Jericho."

CHAPTER XXII

O'HAGAN brooded over his muscles like a mother over her babe. With shirt-sleeves rolled up to his shoulders he tightened his biceps, watched them swell after half an hour's bout with the clubs, caressed them, almost kissed them. By the very way in which he moved it became apparent that his body was once more growing to be a delight to him. He even knocked off that one nightly pint. His "old woman" found him captious in the matter of food, refusing anything that "swills yer innards," or runs to fat. He hardly spoke; his little eyes were fixed and watchful. It seemed as though they were set—with the heavy, slow brain at the back of them—upon one distant objective. "O'Hagan looks like a fighting cock with his beak to a chalked line. I wonder if he thinks—but it's impossible, I've told him, times without number, that he'll never be fit for the ring again," remarked Treherne.

O'Hagan's immediate "chalk-line," however, had nothing to do with "the ring;" for the moment he was engrossed in the business of getting himself into "the pink," but it was beyond this that he looked.

At last he was satisfied. "There's silk for you, and the right stuff 'neath it," he said, and stretched his bare arm to Miss Villiers, Nurse Fenton's assistant.

With an air of melancholy absorption peculiar to her she ran her pointed fingers up and down the smooth white arm—the skin as fine as a woman's, almost without a hair—felt the swelling muscles.

"Good!" she said, "and now what are you going to do, eh, O'Hagan?"

"Have a smack at that there b——y Kaiser."

They had not expected this. Somehow no one had thought for a moment that the ex-prize fighter might join a regiment of fighting men. But this was only because they were not equal to the task of seeing things as they appeared to O'Hagan. He might don the uniform—cavalry, artillery, infantry—but never for a moment would he be that microcosm of empire, just a private soldier. For too long had he held his place as the centre, the very reason, of the ring. He could not *belong* to any regiment, he would be *it*. At the very thought of a fight the old days were with him once more, that sense of excitement so keen that it was icy; a feeling of mastery, which carried with it the assurance, the deliberation, the calm of a god. Oh yes, "them there gory Germans 'ull learn a thing or two if they wunst find themselves up against the Wapping Wonder!"

That was why he was so engrossed in himself. It was pride not humility which drove him to such a perfection of pinkness. The idiots who enrolled him might not realise what they had got; but he would see to it that they had the best, at its very best.

He did not boast nor talk; but deep in his slow moving mind was the conviction that if only the authorities could get hold of a few men like him—and, mind you, there were very few of them—the trouble would be at an end in no time.

"It's not only the things as a chap like me, as knows all the ropes, is up to doin' on," he said, "it's the style o' the whole b——y thing."

When he went up to the nearest City recruiting office to offer himself he was wonderful to behold. His straight, neutral tinted hair, plastered flat to his head, shone like a casque: he was raw with close shaving, the back of his neck showed pink above the velvet collar of his blue pilot coat. It was sheer joy for him to stand before the mirrors in the shop windows, and note the easy breadth of his own shoulders, the spring he gave as he moved catlike in his shiny boots, swinging to and fro upon the ball of his foot. No courtesan could have felt greater joy in herself, loved

herself better, thrilled with a more insolent confidence in her own supremacy.

And then they turned him down.

They turned him down at the Tower, and he went on to the recruiting station at the Mansion House, feeling bewildered, a little stunned, but nothing more.

Once more he was refused.

He tried the Strand, and again the same thing happened.

It was too late for anything more that day. The fact that he did not end it dead drunk testified to his belief that the doctors were mere idiots. Though there was the look of a stricken beast—which does not know how or why it has been hurt—upon his face as he set the supper that night: silent, absorbed, breathing on the spoons, polishing them as in a dream.

That very evening a man had been fished out of the river. For close on three hours everyone had made sure that he was dead; then he struggled back to life. Treherne, his face drawn with fatigue, was telling D'Eath of the affair—which accounted for his own late appearance—when O'Hagan, coming in with the beer, made his one contribution to that night's conversation.

"There's some folks as never do know when they're well off. S'elp me, Gawd, but if a chap's once dead he'd best stay dead, fur 'isself an' all concarned."

He said nothing of his day's endeavour. Perhaps this showed that somewhere, deep down in his inner consciousness, was a vague, dreadful doubt, a fear that what Doctor Treherne had said respecting the ring might equally well apply to the army; though not for a moment would he allow this fear to form itself to a distinct thought, let alone words, added no explanation to his request for another day off. By this time he was like a man with a cancer who is determined to know nothing for certain.

He was at it again early next morning.

By the end of the day he had been refused by practically every recruiting station in London. He, Michael O'Hagan, who worshipped his body, who again and again—in those

old training days—had put it before every temptation of wine and women. He—to be turned down as unfit!

No one—unless it may be some woman who has known what it is to have her love, the beauty which had seemed sure as life, counted for nought—can guess what this meant to him.

It was the destruction of the temple.

And, God! to think of the squat, knock-kneed, bleareyed, bandy-legged, misbegotten scuts that were taken in his place!

It was little wonder that he went "on the booze" for a solid week, left the Pier Head household in charge of his "old woman"; that he ran amuck in the Turk's Head, and dislocated the potman's shoulder in showing what he could do.

"He's in that way as 'e'd be tikin' up wiv anuvver lidy if I was married ter 'im; which, thank Gawd, as I ain't, an' none o' my children born in wedlock neiver."

"Why, *if* you were married?" inquired D'Eath.

"Well, fur one thing the married 'uns don't keep their places as I keep mine, nor feed their men as I feeds mine neiver. The married 'uns is that certain, male an' female, as they fink anyfink's good enuff. I won't deny as O'Agan goes off the lines a bit now an' agin. But 'e don't not stay off, nuffink ter speak on. An' fur why? 'E knows if 'e did as 'e'd find me gorn, done a bolt, 'ousekeepin' along o' anuvver gent when 'e come back. An' the children too, they're mine not 'is, you mind that, an' e's real set on the childer. Marry 'im! That's wot all them religious coves is round me ter do, but I knows better. 'E's been a good man ter me an' where's the use o' brikin' hup an 'appy 'ome? That's wot I tells 'em. They means well, like ennuf, but they don't not know nuffin' o' 'uman natchure, them wiv their parlours an' 'armoniums." She was buoyant, hopeful—a "glutton" for work, as they said of her man in the ring—but for all that her shrewd face grew a little drawn and set before O'Hagan came back this time, took up the thread of a normal life once more.

When he did at last reappear it seemed as though he had dropped to pieces inside his "silk," which hung in leaden tinted bags under his chin and round his eyes.

He was very silent. Even when Alf called to say good-bye on the eve of his departure to France he volunteered no remark, merely appraised the squat little figure with one long contemptuous stare, then moved to the window and spat out of it.

There was a man working in the tiny strip of garden below. "By gums! if yer gob on me again, yer——" he began furiously: looked up, saw who it was and bent again in sullen silence to his work. O'Hagan had never been a good man to meddle with, he was worse than ever now.

D'Eath went downstairs and out to the door with Alf. "They're bofe comin' ter the station ter see me off," said the little man; there was an odd look of dazed bewilderment in his eyes as though, somehow or other, life had got beyond him. "Bofe of 'em. It mikes a man feel sorter small don't it, them bein' so friendly: sorter as if 'e weren't not worth fightin' about. But wiv them there women, it's the unexpectedness o' 'em as gets a chap in the wind. I suppose, now, yer wouldn't not think o' comin' too? Ter 'ave some'un o' me own sect, doncher see."

He hesitated with an anxious breath as though the thing had indeed, and quite literally, got him in the wind; while D'Eath, readily enough, gave his promise to be at the station, to speed the parting hero, maintain the peace.

CHAPTER XXIII

It is needless to say that no one was satisfied by Susie's assertion of well-being. The family retained its anxiety because it knew that it ought to be anxious—even the two cousins, who came to inquire regularly each morning, conscious of a thrill of hope that something really exciting might have happened. It was dreadful to think of any girl of Susie's youth and inexperience alone in London. It would have been almost more dreadful to have heard of her going meekly back to school, but still—— Oh, well, it was dreadful, anyhow! "The uncertainty!" that's what they all said; while at the back of the mind of every one of them lay a resentful conviction that the creature was only too well able to take care of herself, though to confess as much would have seemed a slur on them all; stood for a refutation of that principle which supposed a girl of Susie's class far less capable of exacting respect, holding her own, than any labourer's daughter of her age, or less, setting out for her first situation among strangers.

Irene, alone, showed indifference. "We've all got our own lives to live," that was what she said, meaning that she did not intend to be disturbed, to waste her time over anything less than "a cause." Perhaps Vera was the most harrowed, partly because of certain things which her young husband had told her—simply to show how much he knew—partly because of the fact, which no one would ever allow her to forget, that it was she who had left Susie alone at Paddington.

If they had only known, if they could have so much as guessed, that the truant's plans had but little to do with England, let alone London, realised anything of the cool decision, the secrecy with which she had set to work

to carry them out, they would have been appalled, outraged by the deceit involved in such a display of character, such reticence, above all, such competence; while there is no doubt that the relations of Joan of Arc in the fifteenth century would have felt much as they felt in the twentieth, for the resentment of the chicks against the duckling is unchanging.

And yet how could they guess? After all, one can but prophesy a little in advance of what one knows, and this was beyond them. They could not have attempted what Susie attempted, simply because they would never have cared enough to think of it, plan it. They were of the wrong age, a year or so too early; even Irene with her wearisome modernity. For the whole thing—vain attempt though it might be—was characteristic of nothing in the world save that amazing mixture of romance, chivalry, hard horse-sense, epic deeds and clipped, indifferent talk which represents the extreme youth of the amazing age in which we live.

After all, the round swing of the pendulum had brought Susie nearer to her father than to any other member of her family; he, at least, had dreamt of romance, adventure.

Perhaps she realised this; perhaps, intermingled with her affection, was the feeling that he gave her some sort of an excuse, acted as a species of springboard, for her own love of adventure. Anyhow, the great scheme hung round and upon him. She was going to see for herself how he was treated, join him at Nauheim. It was a sort of female knight errantry, and yet it was less than that, for mingled with it was the thought of what "sucks" it would be to Mary and the others; particularly Mary, who had always behaved as though her father were her own private possession, close-cultured to her liking.

Susie's motives might have been mixed, all motives are; but her aim was clear, narrowing down to one fine, intense point, concentrated upon Nauheim.

Not for one single moment did she conjecture anything

like failure. She had a theory, part character, part the result of an ultra-modern education—discouraging any weak, over-confidence in Providence—that one could always do anything which one really set one's mind to. She simply did not see herself as failing. So far her life, her aims had always been within the scope of her endeavour. This had given her time to grow, but she never had learnt, never could learn, anything by it; it is only from the rebuffs of life that we do this.

Anyhow, she had never "muffed" any exam. yet, failed to get the better of an antagonistic mistress. She had led every girl in her school. Any forces which were opposed against her she had despised; some she had left untouched simply because she realised them as part of the stupid routine of everyday life, not worth troubling about, like that silly custom of wearing skirts—tolerated because so easily discarded.

Still, she had her weakness, the weakness of all cocksure youth—a poor idea of values. And perhaps this is not, in the end, a disadvantage—at any rate, so far as the peace of mind of the elders is concerned; for the steady, outer pressure of ways and means, pros and cons, addition and subtraction, acts upon it much as the pressure of atmosphere upon all inhabitants of this terrestrial globe. Without it, how far might not youth jump over the moon, missing firm earth altogether upon its return?

The hand which rocks the cradle may rule the world—sentimentally speaking; but the hand which holds the purse-string is more immediately efficacious.

Susie's first qualm came when she went to Cooks' office and discovered how much it might cost her to get to Nauheim.

Up to this her path had been sunny, unchequered by the faintest cloud. She had simply waited until her sister was well out of the way; put her large box in the cloak-room, gone to the waiting-room, taken a packet of hair-pins out of her little suit-case—in which, in common with all boys and girls returning to school, she carried the neces-

sities for that night—and for the first time in her life did up her hair—deftly, with immense decision.

She had bought the hair-pins in Chingford that last day she drove there with Peggy, drew her savings out of the bank. The fact that young Mrs. D'Eath represented these as amounting to twenty pounds, instead of ten, as was the case, was merely the outcome of that lady's desire to improve on any sort of a thrill.

The weary-eyed, untidy women who sat round the walls of the waiting-room, stuffy and travel-stained, the crumby mouthed whiny children—every one of whom seemed to have absorbed something of the dreary atmosphere of the place, to be specifically those sort of people one does find in waiting-rooms and nowhere else—watched her with dull curiosity, resentful of her bright, clear-cut youth, the vigour and certainty of her every movement; while more than one greasy complexioned woman drew out a powder-puff or handkerchief and wiped it surreptitiously over her face.

"Paint," whispered one to another, and knew as she spoke that she lied, that the fresh colour in the girl's face owed nothing to art.

As she put on her hat Susie regarded herself with some complacency. Her head felt curiously top-heavy, but with her hair twisted up under her hat she looked at least nineteen; her white silk blouse, with its loose, turned-down collar, was fresh and uncrumpled, her neatly laced brown boots polished to perfection; she drew a pair of clean doe-skin gloves from her bag and felt herself ready for anything, with a faint touch of scorn at the thought of how fussed and flurried Mary always looked after a journey. The great principle of Susie's school had always been a neat efficiency; it was not much, but it gave any girl a good foundation to work upon. Centuries might have separated her from Mary, even from Irene with her crude self-assertion; for never have all the ideals of femininity shuffled themselves so rapidly as during the time that Susie D'Eath was, with the cool deliberation of her kind, passing from childhood to womanhood.

Feeling perfectly grown up, sure of herself, she took

a taxi to Victoria and engaged a room at the Grosvenor Hotel for that night. Anyhow, this brought her so much nearer to her goal.

It was after this that she went to Cooks' offices, gathered all particulars as to the method of obtaining a passport; the necessary photographs, the possible route. As Cooks' people seemed to regard Nauheim as impossible—Flushing and Wiesbaden, which she had coolly counted upon, out of the question—she gave in to what she regarded as the fussiness of all real grown-ups, and booked to Paris. It was an awful way round, but from there it would, of course, be easy to get on; it seemed to her, thinking over journeys she had heard of, that everyone started for everywhere from Paris. Her complete ignorance stood her in the place of courage. "Not get to Nauheim?" she would have said. "I'd like to know what there is to stop me!" In her own way she was just as conceited as the rest of the family; she did not actually think herself great, but she was unaware of anyone greater—unless it were General French and Joffre, and, anyhow, they were too big to count, like other suns.

She had her photograph taken, and got her passport. At that time private travellers were interfered with as little as possible, and there could be no possible reason for blocking a quiet, self-reliant young person on her way to join her father in France.

Though Cooks' people could not, or would not, book her to Nauheim, they had given her a little book with maps which marked out the entire route, via Metz and Wiesbaden; and the fact of only having paid for a ticket to Paris made her feel rich again, though the hotel bill gave her another qualm.

She had a good crossing, the only person she spoke to on the boat being a young man in mufti. There were a great many young men in uniform, and she despised him a little on account of his civilian clothes. But as he had a chair next to hers and lent her half his rug—for all her efficiency she had not thought to provide herself with

one, and the day was chilly with a high wind and racing waves—she felt that it was only right to be civil.

She patronised him a great deal; and yet, in looking back upon this first meeting, her cheeks burned to think how much, despite all her patronage, she had told him about herself, while he had told her nothing whatever. In his own way he seemed as certain of the world and his own place in it as she did, and she wondered why. He could not be up to much, or he would have joined the Army like all those nice boys she had met at Cromer.

She as good as told him so, even wondered whether, despite the rug, she might not go downstairs and extract a white feather from one of the pillows.

"It's the sort of time when everyone ought to be doing something. It beats me how any man, who is a man, can bear to be out of it now—the greatest war the world has ever known! If only I——" She paused; he was looking at her critically, not in the least shamefaced.

"I say, do you know that your hair's coming down," he said; and then added, kindly, as Susie put up one hand to the heavy coil—flushing crimson with a sense of unutterable shame—that he supposed it took some time getting into the way of being "put up": "I know if I change the parting in my hair it's the very deuce, just to begin with, you know," he added cheerfully; while Susie, in a fury, wondered why in the world he should imagine his wretched parting mattered to her, mattered to anyone.

At Calais she lost sight of him, gave him no second thought; for though Cromer had, in its own way, been exciting Calais was marvellous, with its crowds, its air of fierce, concentrated busyness.

To Susie it seemed as though she were suddenly launched forward upon the outer rim of some immense, swiftly turning wheel, the further curve of which was far beyond her vision; that she was in an exhilarating fashion part of a movement more stupendous than anything which had ever gone before:

far more stupendous than it had seemed when she spoke of it to the young man on the steamer.

She felt so small amid the surging preoccupied crowds that she was convinced of her perfect freedom to do as she liked, go where she liked; and this, though it might have terrified a more timid nature, gave her a feeling of security. The sense of her infinitesimal place in this immense new world did not humiliate her, it took a great deal—apart from personal matters like her hair coming down—to humiliate Susie D'Eath at this time; rather it gave her a sense of pride, such as, were it a sentient thing, might be felt by some tiny cog in an immense bulk of machinery.

At any rate, she was *in* it. She was "doing her bit"—already the odious catch-phrase had sprung into being, along with "business as usual," and that lying proverb against swopping horses in the midst of the stream.

She was very tired by the time she reached Paris, left her bag at a small hotel conveniently close to the Gare du Nord. And yet she would not rest; she could not afford to stay more than one night, and even she realised that there was still a great deal to be arranged.

By dint of persistent questioning of people who did not seem to understand their own language, she made her way to Cooks' offices: there she met with what might have been described as the first bone in her filleted fish.

It was perfectly impossible for anyone to get through to Germany at this juncture. There could be no question of it. Cooks' people were very decided, much more decided than they had been in London: still they did not shake her confidence, though in truth they gave her a jar.

Wearied out by her persistence they at last sent her to the British Consulate. But by the time Susie found her way to the Rue Faubourg St. Honoré it was almost dark, far too late to do anything that night, and she went back to the hotel: then, realising that she dare not venture on dinner, for her rapidly diminishing finances frightened her—setting her teeth fiercely over the realisation that things were not going to be so easy as she had thought—she started out

again in search of a small café where she could have some chocolate and rolls.

She found a place which looked quiet and might have enjoyed her meal, for the people amused her, had not a middle-aged man, after persistent staring and smiling, got up with his glass in his hand, and, sitting down at her table, tried to enter into conversation with her. She was not frightened, only angry; she did not realise all it meant, but it was "cheek," and she told him what she thought of him in her choicest French. All the same, she burnt her tongue by a too rash attack upon her scalding chocolate so that it smarted for the rest of the evening; while the rough feel of a scalded tongue for ever served to remind her of something so unutterably "beastly" in the dapper stranger's gaze that poor Major Gilbey's kiss seemed, by comparison, pure and fresh as some celestial salute.

Susie slept soundly, though the sound of the traffic over cobbled streets ran like an accompaniment through all her dreams; and when the next day dawned in a flood of brilliant sunshine, she was, once more, completely confident.

The first thing was to go to the Consulate. She went, and she waited—waited—until she half forgot what she was waiting for.

The room into which she had been shown was crowded to suffocation. For the first time in her life Susie was conscious of a strange uneasiness at the thought of her own small place in this hot and irritated throng, amid this mass of people who might be every bit as determined to do the thing they wished to do, as she herself was determined to do the thing she wished—meant to do.

The resentful, half animal suspicion with which they looked round at each other every time a fresh name was called was evidence of an antagonism which hung like an actual presence in the close room. Now and then someone spoke to her, asked her a question, but she took very little notice of what was said: it seemed as though all trivial doubts, uncertainties, were floated away like straws upon

the stream of her immense determination; pushed aside by the almost fierce hold which she kept upon herself.

Even what the doorkeeper said about "shady characters," when she expressed a wish to wait in the passage where it was cooler, appeared to pass her by at the time: though the meaning of it all bit in, returned again and again, whenever she was nervous or depressed, for years to come, as, "Is that how I really strike people?"

It seemed as though that period of waiting would never end: children whimpered, feet shuffled; a heavy haze of heat and dust thickened the air so that the whole scene appeared as unreal as a dream in which, through all one's discomfort and fear, one is still aware that one is dreaming.

After a while this effect was increased by the fact that she grew so numbed—huddled upon a hard chair, with her feet drawn up for safety beneath the lower rail—that she was half dead to the jostling crowd, which seemed as though it touched her through some thickness of felt or wadding.

During the first half hour, each time the door opened she had felt confident that the name called must be her own; while she glanced round her with a sort of scorn for those people who had allowed themselves to be kept waiting for so long.

After a little while her nerves became strung to such a pitch she felt that, if the next name was *not* her own, she would shriek.

Following upon this came a period of indifference and despair. When at last the summons did come, she was so deadened that she failed to move, might have missed her chance had it not been that the doorkeeper—peering through his spectacles at the paper he held in his hand—hesitating over the name, repeated it more than once, trying over a diversity of pronunciations, so odd that someone tittered and Susie moved stiffly from the room, her head held high, her face crimson.

She had been so certain of success. "One can do anything if one is only determined enough." The brilliant morning had revived all her old belief; and though the long

wait had numbed her physically, it had not dimmed her faith. She saw one of the younger secretaries, but she would not even listen to what he said: youth was wonderful, but in an affair like this youth was liable to error, did not count. Insisting, refusing to take "no" for an answer, she was passed on and on. If she had not been so young, so pretty, she, and her outrageous request, would have been treated with very scant ceremony. As it was, one man after another listened to what she had to say, glancing at her, smiling. A crowd is an ugly thing, even the individual members of it seem, after a while, to become tainted; here was something of the sort that they had not seen for days. On the whole the older, more responsible men were kinder than the young ones—it was a mere junior clerk who said the unforgettable, unforgivable thing. But all this kindness, this tolerance, this amusement stood for anything but success. Very slowly, very surely, it dawned upon Susie that it meant not taking her quite seriously, treating her as something of a joke—delightful, and yet a joke.

When she at last succeeded in reaching the Consul himself it was no better, worse even. "If you went into Germany now, do you know what would happen to you? You'd be gobbled up—yes—gobbled up by the Germans—like Red Riding Hood by the wolf." That was what he said; then he beckoned to a clerk, glanced at Susie, and murmured something about "a case for Mrs. Jervis."

She was shown back into the crowded waiting-room, told she must not go away on any account. She saw the clerk who escorted her speak to the man at the door, who glanced at her surlily, and felt as though she were a prisoner.

By now the room was even more densely packed than it had been before, stiflingly hot. There was no chance of a seat. Trying to push her way to the window, it seemed as though the other applicants for passports had grown increasingly hostile. She had got her chance, what had she done with it? Why had she been sent back? She felt that she was suspected, and her cheeks burned.

A white-faced youth at her side—with retreating chin and forehead, and a mouth like a wolf, full of strong, discoloured teeth—who had been called to order for smoking, glanced at her sideways, and smirked; touched her with his sharp elbow. "So they've got their knife into you too? What 'ave you been up to?"

Susie, holding her head high, with flaming cheeks, did not answer. After a moment's pause he went on with some suggestion, of which she could not quite follow the context; but it seemed to be based upon some plan whereby she should take a situation as a lady's maid and find out where her mistress kept her jewels, sneak the keys so that he might have them copied. "If we've both got to stay here, we might as well make something out of it," she understood him to say; adding some confused words to the effect that she was a "smart-looking girl, just the right sort." But it was as difficult to follow his words—cockney English interspersed with French slang—as it would have been to determine his nationality, which appeared to have been lost in a cosmopolitanism of villainy.

At length, in self-defence, Susie told him that she was trying to get to Germany, upon which he shouted with laughter, drew the attention of the entire room upon her. "But you must be mad—a fool!" he cried; then added, "Unless you also are a Boche."

This did for her. Her fair hair, her fresh skin damned her. She was a German, there was no mistake about that. If anyone wondered why, in this case, she should have been waiting at the British Consulate, there was the answer ready in a moment. She was a spy, that's what she was, a spy, like all the rest of that hated race.

She had elbow-room enough after this; for one and all they drew away from her, glancing at her sideways, whispered, "shooting out their lips."

At last her name was again called, and she was shown into a tiny box of a room where she found that Mrs. Jervis, of whom the Consul had spoken, waiting for her. So this was it. She—Susie D'Eath—was to be put in charge—not

of the police, but far worse, far more humiliating—of this woman, a member of that "Young Women's Christian Association" which Mary could not tolerate, because she declared that it put ideas into the servants' heads. And why, why? Well, because the Consul thought—"we all think," she had the audacity to add, as though it had anything in the world to do with her—that Miss D'Eath would be better at home, and Mrs. Jervis had been given instructions to see her off by the boat-train that night; stay by her until this end had been accomplished.

Susie was wild with rage. Still, the woman was stout and elderly, it would surely be easy enough to dodge her—to throw oneself into the Seine, anything, anything would be preferable to the ignominy of being followed, guarded. But for all her bulk Mrs. Jervis was quick on her feet; and even Susie could not actually *run* through the streets of Paris.

Still Mrs. Jervis could not handcuff or hold her, she could but follow; and follow she did when a new spurt of hope, or obstinacy, sent the girl careering on from the Consulate to the British Embassy.

Mrs. Jervis had sandwiches and ate them, stolidly, while she waited; for in her work amongst stray English girls in Paris she was always prepared against emergencies of this sort. Not for anything in the world would Susie have accepted one, but her head was swimming. It was many hours since she had eaten; and her light "petit déjeuner"—no porridge, no eggs, no bacon, no anything—seemed centuries removed from the indrawn, hollow space which formed her body, the leaden, solid weight of her feet, the far-away emptiness of her head.

From the very first it was evident that there was no chance of seeing His Excellency: but the private secretary might be able to spare them a moment when he had finished his lunch. Almost, as it seemed to Susie, she was getting used to being put off with the second best, almost humble, almost thankful.

But even then, after waiting hours—years—the secretary was called off on some urgent business—"having quite

finished his lunch," as Susie remarked bitterly—and it was one of the under-secretaries who saw them.

He wore a light grey cutaway coat, buttoned in rather tight at the waist, where he bent a little as though nature had formed him for bows; his glossy hair and patent-leather boots struck Susie as being of an equal smooth shininess. She had an idea that because he was what she called a "knut" she would be able to do what she liked with him. As a matter of fact—though he evinced none of that almost affectionate jocularity which had so infuriated her, or solid, businesslike impassivity which had seemed the only alternative—he simply slid past her, smiled absent-mindedly when she spoke of Nauheim, shook his head and devoted his whole attention to what Mrs. Jervis found to say; as though *she* were *the person.*

Between anger, disappointment, hunger and desperate fatigue Susie was trembling from head to foot by the time that she once more emerged into the sunshine flooding the street. In a last bid for independence—or was it the sick desperation of a creature which knows itself to be beaten, desires nothing on earth apart from the chance to creep away, hide itself in darkness and solitude—she turned upon the impassive woman at her side.

"Now—now, you've got what you wanted, seen me beaten—think you've seen me beaten—perhaps you'll leave me alone, stop following me—dogging me like this. I tell you I won't have any more of it! I—I——"

Her voice broke, a wave of blackness, punctuated by small yellow dots, surged up before her. All at once it seemed as though the wind changed; and though the sun still shone—as the first faintness swept past her she saw it, still clear and merciless, saw Mrs. Jervis's pale, squareish face, and the green umbrella lined with white which she opened, held over her—she shivered.

"I'm going back to my hotel—you can go where you like. I——" In her despair she had put up one hand and hailed a crawling taxi, conscious the while that she ought to walk, couldn't afford to drive. "Ugh! Now—now I shall

—do—do—you—in the eye!" she added; as it drew up and she pitched forward, fumbling blindly for the handle of the door.

"Allow me," said Mrs. Jervis; helped her in, then stepped in after her and gave the driver his direction—in French, which even Susie recognised as atrocious.

Susie never remembered very much of that drive back to the hotel, save that moving her swimming head uneasily—with a feeling as though it were too heavy for her neck—she felt it drawn to rest upon something warm, bony, and yet in a way comforting, which might or might not have been Mrs. Jervis's shoulder; while, after a long space, she found herself lying on the bed in her own room, with the green outside shutters closed, while her enemy fed her with strong broth from a spoon; then—leaving her to fall in and out of a series of rather light-headed naps, confused dreams—fell to collecting her belongings, packing her suit-case.

After a while the good woman murmured something about going to the station to see about the train, and crept from the room. "Here's my chance of escape," thought Susie, and dragging herself into an upright position dropped her feet to the floor; feeling about for her shoes, so feebly that when, after a moment's pause, she heard the key very gently turned in the lock outside she was conscious—as she dropped back on the bed, turning on her side, hugging the cool pillow—of no feeling of anger or outrage; nothing indeed but an intense relief at the realisation of her own helplessness, the futility of any further effort, the possibility of further sleep.

When she awoke it was dark, the jalousies were thrown back, and the sweet, dampish evening air streamed into the room; in the street below heavy motor lorries, vehicles of every description flowed past in an endless, turbulent stream, for the battle of the Aisne was in full swing, and men and cannon alike in urgent need of food.

"You can't start to-night, after all," said Mrs. Jervis; "the Calais route is closed; you will have to go round

by Dieppe, and there's no train until five o'clock to-morrow morning. If you feel better now, don't you think it would be a good thing to get up and come out and have some dinner, eh?"

She had a slow, north-country voice, with a tonic burr in it; there never could have been anyone plainér, squarer, more uncompromisingly English, middle-class, respectable; her mouth was as firmly set within its straight, decorous bounds as her tight door-knocker of grey hair. It would, indeed, be a venturesome Lothario who would get up from his chair and speak to her to-night, thought Susie, feeling—in her weakness and lassitude—profoundly grateful for the fact.

"Anyhow," she thought, with a sudden return of her native fairness and honesty, "it can't be much fun for her, after all; and she has most awfully kind eyes."

CHAPTER XXIV

SUSIE'S place was booked in the morning train, but Mrs. Jervis had been told that if she wished to be sure of it she ought to be there at least half an hour before it started. It seemed that she raked Susie out of bed much too early, and, protesting, she arrived at the Gare with a good half-hour to spare, over and above that which had been advised. But even thus she was none too early, and the whole place was thronged with passengers who had apparently been waiting there all night. It seemed, indeed, as though she would never be able to tear her way through the mass of humanity, find her allotted place, evict, even with the aid of the stationmaster—who was respectful because of plain Mrs. Jervis, whom he knew, and not in the least because of Miss D'Eath of Dene Royal, whom he did not know—the man who had already established himself in her corner seat with "a damsel dark" upon his knee.

But it was not only the crowd which was alarming; it was the way in which some few savaged themselves to the front, their abandonment of all courtesy and self-restraint; then again the desperate and almost terrifying patience of others—mostly women these, hung round by bundles, with crying children in their arms, clinging to their skirts —their air of having lost all count of time, all hope.

At the very last moment Susie leant from the window and drew a young woman with two tiny children into her already overcrowded compartment, thinking with the courage, the optimism of youth, "I can quite well stand."

She never forgot that journey—years later the very smell of a train would bring it all back to her—the cramped position, the endless stoppages—always where

there was no station, no possible chance of getting anything to drink—the dreadful heat generated by the close pressure of human bodies; the flies, the smell of the food which the people drew from their bundles; the look of an old man sleeping with his mouth and eyes open, his head fallen all sideways as though he were dead; the fashion in which one white-faced, youngish woman sat bent forward over her knees and moaned almost without ceasing; the way another wept—wept without a pause, the tears streaming unchecked down her face, falling like rain upon her hands, her lap; the sort of mind which—even in the midst of all that misery—drove a dissolute-looking man to leer at her, Susie, pinch her arm.

After nearly three hours the train did at last draw up at a station; the woman to whom Susie had given her seat got out, and she sank into it. The platform was at the opposite side of the carriage, and though she was parched with thirst she did not dare get out in search of something to drink, for the people were like waves against the windows—one man actually ran along the outer side of the train, and tried to get in at the side where Susie was sitting. She would have helped him, but the others would not have him, even the weeping woman checked her tears to call out upon him. They were already packed to suffocation; there was not floor room for as much as another pair of feet; apart from this their own fight for life, escape from heaven only knows what horrors—for more than one came from the invaded regions—had rendered them merciless; these people trying now to crush them to death were at the right side of Paris; why should they expect to have things made easy for them?

At Rouen—which they only reached late that afternoon, for the constant stoppages, the shuntings on to sidings where, again and again, they lay as though forgotten, had dragged the journey out to an apparently interminable length—the greater number of the occupants of Susie's carriage got out. But still she did not dare to move; for a fresh mass of people surged along the platform,

and a dreadful picture of what might happen were she not able to rejoin the train, forced to stay in Rouen with next to no money kept her chained to her seat.

Suddenly amid the excited crowd, which seemed to be tearing the dismounting passengers to pieces in its fury of impatience, Susie caught sight of what—in that sea of strangers—seemed like a familiar face, a red head, the shoulders of a shabby suit of civilian tweeds; and regardless of the fact that the man was in reality a mere stranger, forgetting all her scorn for that same civilian suit—brand of ignominy—she leant from the window, waved, shouted to her former fellow-traveller.

A broad grin dawned slowly over the young man's face as he made his way towards her, climbed into the already bursting carriage, and settled himself with his back against the door.

"Hallo! this is jolly—seeing you again! You look pretty fagged; wait until we shake down a bit. I've got some fruit and a bottle of claret in my knapsack and we'll celebrate," he said; then added cheerfully to his nearest neighbour—a stout, elderly gentleman in a black alpaca suit. "If you could possibly make it convenient to keep off my toes and that lady's lap, it might add to the harmony of nations—eh, what?"

Never, never in all her life had Susie been so glad to see anybody; even more glad when on reaching Dieppe in the soft pink and grey mist of late evening she found that the boat was not leaving until next morning. Now, supposing that her money did not run to paying the bill at the Hôtel du Chariot d'Or, the only place where she could succeed in obtaining even the tiniest room, there was at least one person who would vouch for her respectability, see to it that she was not left to languish in a French prison—or even worse, held up to ridicule, ignominy.

CHAPTER XXV

GONE were the racing waves, the blue sky, the buoyant, blood-stirring winds of that outward voyage.

A thick mist hung around the steamer, which moved slowly and tentatively, like some ponderous live creature feeling her way fearfully, with strange cries, heavy, anxious breaths.

Every now and then some dim form slid out of the mist and she paused, panting anxiously, while a wraith-like form on the bridge bellowed its answer, its assent to instructions.

The passengers, mooning restlessly about the deck or leaning over the taffrail, spoke almost in whispers. It seemed as though the fog, the sense of danger, oppressed, overawed them.

Moisture dripped from the boats overhead, from every scrap of rigging—greasy moisture blackened with smoke from the funnels.

To Susie D'Eath it seemed as though they were in a world apart from anything that had ever gone before: that the journey could never come to an end, that they would go on like this for ever.

Not that she wanted it to come to an end, and her own depression, sense of finality frightened her, she had never felt like that before. She had a dreadful sense of being beaten. The outraged amazement, the furious incredulity of the day before had given place to a new and appalling sense of helplessness. For the first time in her life she was up against that impregnable wall which sets the bounds to our own powers, marks our own limitations and the concentrated, indifferent force of conditions against which we are powerless to contend. She had, indeed, encountered people

who were far stronger than herself, stronger and most terrifying because of this very indifference, an interlocking, far-reaching ring of systems which counted out her very existence—the existence of all D'Eaths of Dene Royal, of Laishens of Little Laishens, of Suttons.

When someone during those awful hours had said—"You ought to have had more sense than to start off on such a fool's errand," and she murmured she was "sorry," her critic had remained unmoved. This alone showed what the world could be like at its worst!

"What good does it do being sorry?" This was what the young clerk had said, and the words came like a blow.

It was almost incredible that anyone could be so hard. She did not remember ever having expressed contrition for anything before; that had been one of Mary's complaints about her—"If you would only say that you're sorry when you have done wrong."

Now she had made this amend, and it had been brushed aside with scorn. She was more amazed than outraged; but even this was not such a facer as it was to find that her word was not taken without some corroborative evidence.

"Bound to be careful, you know; all sorts of queer, shady characters—women especially—about nowadays." That was said as though she, Susie D'Eath, might actually prove to be one of them—"a queer, shady character."

It is rather an awful moment for youth when it first realises a world to which it means nothing whatever; finds itself obliged to stand completely upon its own merits, among people who do not care in the very least what it is, what it has done; disregards its family, its rank, its very youth, judges it not only from the standpoint of what it can do—but whether it can do exactly the right thing at the right moment; whether it is or is not of use.

This epoch represents one of the landmarks of life. Yet another comes when we realise that there are no

irresistible temptations left to us. And this latter experience marks the beginning of old age as surely as the former marks the dawn of maturity.

Susie D'Eath had gone out to France a child; she returned a woman.

Mark Fulton, upon the hard bench at her side—for no deck-chairs were allowed, "in case," they said—puffing steadily at his pipe, glancing at her sideways, felt that the very curve of her cheek was finer, less rounded.

On her outward journey she had talked of herself; now the position was reversed. Her companion was anxious about her; he wanted to know something of her future plans, details concerning that trip to Paris, of which she had told him nothing, save that she had gone out to do something very special, had failed. He also had failed in what he set out to do. But with him it was not the first time; he was older, and he was the sort of man who, in his light-hearted way, was accustomed to take risks. Later on, when Susie learnt to know some of his friends, heard him spoken of, she realised that there were few men who had taken greater risks, done more daring things in a less flamboyant fashion, valued life less.

He was naturally modest, very reluctant to talk about himself, inclined to be inarticulate. But he forced himself to tell the girl something of his own life with the idea of winning her further confidences.

He began with his other failures. As he told them they sounded almost funny, just the sort of silly things which might happen to anyone. But later, in thinking them over, they took shape in Susie's mind, and well might have done in any mind, however mature, as the plain record of something amazing, pathetic, altogether admirable—more admirable than any success.

At first she scarcely listened. She felt that Mark Fulton was a friend, and there was comfort in his friendship, his very nearness; but she was immersed in her own troubles. Her father was as far away as ever; she could not keep her thoughts upon him because he was so far away, and

she herself so near. Her anxieties regarding money, her determination not to go back to Dene Royal or to school, own herself beaten, submit to being questioned, her own individuality, all these were so insistent that they pushed themselves in between herself and the very reason of her journey, her actual failure.

"The Germans could not be worse than George—George and Mary together. Perhaps, after all, he's better off than I am," she thought bitterly. For surely nothing, nothing —no amount of privation, persecution even—could be as hard to bear as the ignominy of this "creeping back."

Gradually, however, what Mark Fulton was saying came home to her; not so much because of what he had to tell her, at least not at first, as on account of the fact that he seemed amused, in a way stimulated, by his own failures. Susie was as imitative as all young things are, and it gave her a new idea for the way of taking life. A faint hope rosé in her heart that, after all, this journey to Paris might come to seem like a real adventure, "a lark," if only she could find courage to pick herself up, laugh at her fall, go on again.

Yes, that was it—go on, keep on. Thus in a fashion Fulton's efforts defeated themselves, at least for the moment, stiffened the girl's back to bear her own burdens.

"Of course, they turned me down," she heard him saying. "I had a sort of hope I'd wriggle through; I believe the first doctor might have passed me, but the second chap spotted me, was down on me like a ton of bricks."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, you know, I had a nasty smash up nearly two years ago, and the sight of one eye's not so good as it might be. The English authorities! By gad! one could only admire them; one gets into the way of thinking one's own people are idiots, but they're not, not by a long chalk. I thought I had all the tests—that a, b, c, x, y, z—rat, cat, dog business—learnt off by heart, and then they changed the whole blessed thing. After that I made sure that I

would get through the French tests; some fellow I know wrote out the whole rigmarole for me. But they had changed that, too, the very day before I got my innings—just like my luck! An' now I suppose I'm done for so far as flying's concerned."

"You wanted—you wanted to get into the Flying Corps?"

"Wanted! That's a mild word."

"And you tried?"

"Well, doesn't any fool try for what he wants? I sort of felt, in my bones, after the first check that I was foredoomed to failure, but I went on trying, partly out of devilment, and—— Oh, well, you know, one *has* to go on. Besides, however many nasty jars one comes up against one still goes on, believes in one's own superiority to the force of circumstances."

"And all the time you *had* tried! You——" For the first time during that crossing Susie had turned, was staring straight at her companion, while a slow wave of crimson swept over her face. When she jerked her head aside—gazing into the blank wall of mist—she still saw the quizzical, freckled face with the light grey eyes, the close-cropped head of dark red hair, so crisp and stubborn in its determination to curl that it was little wonder any parting was difficult. What a bounder, what an utterly presumptuous bounder she had been! "You ought to have told me—why didn't you tell me?"

"I think I wanted to see if you'd really go and do it."

"Do what?"

"Pick a white feather out of someone's pillow, present it to me. It's been done so often; it's quite the thing, you know," he grinned.

One must be very meek to endure the truth. Susie was repentant, but she was by no means meek. "After all, it was your own fault. You ought to say something, do something, wear something."

"Do, say, wear what? A placard with 'Shop soiled,' or, 'Returned empty, with care,' slung round my neck?"

Susie tossed back her head angrily. "Well——" she began, then caught his eye and laughed.

"Fairly had," she acknowledged, with one of her sudden disarming confessions; then added eagerly: "And now, what are you going to do?" She hung upon his answer. What did other people do when they had been beaten in one direction? What would a person like this—so sure of himself—do?

"Oh, start off on some other lay, I suppose; try if they'll take me on as a dispatch rider. I've got an old mouse-trap of a motor-bike of my own, that's something to start with. But it seems a pity; for, after all, I do know something, not much, but something of flying."

"You have flown, really? How perfectly thrilling!" For a moment Susie was clean out of herself, the face she turned towards him alight with excitement.

"Who hasn't, in these days?"

"Well, I haven't, for one; I——" Susie drew herself up sharply; of course he would say, "Oh, well, a girl's different." But he merely remarked, puffing steadily at his pipe, gazing out into the mist—with a rapt look such as one might see upon the face of a woman dreaming of her lover—"There's nothing in the world like it. Who was it said, 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay,' or something of that sort? Well, better fifty hours in the air than a lifetime anywhere else, so far as I'm concerned. And now——"

"But if you're so fond of it as all that it will be awful—a motor-bike after an aeroplane!"

He turned and looked at her gravely, knocking the ashes out of his pipe against the side of his chair. She had regarded him almost as a boy; but in his expression, in his next words, there was a maturity which hurt her almost as much as those doubts cast upon her veracity, the repudiation of her apologies; for it was all a part of finding out that life was not what she had always thought it to be——

"Well, that's what it is, through everything I suppose,

trying to bamboozle oneself into believing that the second best is what one really wants; to soar, jumping ditches on a rackety motor-bike!"

"Well, but—if it's only one eye, and you can still see a little, and there's the other?"

"Well, between you and I and the wall, my head was pretty well bashed about. I've only just given up curling my hyacinthine locks over a dinky little silver plate. I suppose they're afraid of the altitude, or something knocking me over, let alone the Boche getting in on the game side—and an aeroplane costs the Government a lot, you know. A chap on his own motor-bike, now. Well, he may be of real use, and after all he's his own affair."

"How did you learn to fly? How did you get a chance of learning?" How did people do things? How could *she* do things? That was the heart of Susie's question.

"Well, I was always mad about it. I went up for the first time while I was still at school, had flown alone before I was eighteen. I wasn't supposed to be doing it, was learning engineering in the railway works at Ashford. But I couldn't leave it alone, every holiday, every penny I got I spent at Hendon—chaps were frightfully good to me, got to know me. They're a sporting lot, ready to give any man his chance."

"Then you had a fall?"

"Then—like that chap Phaeton, you know—I began to get too big for my boots and started to build a machine of my own. I don't know why, but I can't get it out of my head to-day. I suppose the mist reminds me, and when I see anyone hipped as you're hipped I seem to be remembering back to how I felt when I found out what had happened. We started the thing, I and another chap from the works, in a disused barn upon the Romney Marshes, and it seemed to be pretty well always like this, walled round with mist. We had a little runabout car, and we used to go straight away from our works at Ashford and get down there at half-past six each evening. We began it in the early spring, and, by Jove, the cold was beyond

all words, cold and mist, and chill, salt-laden winds. We fitted up an electric installation, and used to go on working until midnight or later; then scorch back to our digs at Ashford, tumble into bed and sleep like death. I can tell you we needed some calling to get us to the works by six. My mother was alive then, and I used to go up to her in town for week-ends. I remember I grudged it awfully, all that time I might have put into our work, but I'm jolly glad now—she died this winter, just before Christmas.' I used to sleep—ye gods, how I used to sleep! She never could make out what in the world was wrong with me—but I suppose those week-ends were what saved me, kept me going. Anyhow, we finished the blamed thing latish last year. The mists had started again then. Do you know those Romney Marshes? It's a queer part of the world, older, in some odd way, than the rest of England, or more untouched. Yes, that's it, older, as though some sinister pagan forces had got caught there, between civilisation and the sea. There's something jealous and grudging about the place; when there's no mist the clouds are immense; you never saw such stretches of sky and jagged clouds. The wind, too; in a way *it's* personally aggressive, searches out every chink in your armour. Things were always happening; I don't know why, but they were —inexplicable things. It was as though the whole place, pickled in the salt of centuries, resented the very fact of us being there; beyond all, resented the thought of us messing about in an element where we had no manner of right to be. One couldn't drop a hammer without it falling on one's toe. I cut an artery in my wrist the very day we had practically got our job finished; you never saw anything like the way the blood spurted up into the air! That ought to have appeased them—an oblation to the gods! But it didn't. All the parts, the engine itself was as good as we could get it—a J.A.P., and it went! You know that purr when an engine is really loving itself; we had tried it the day before I went up, and it was like music, better than any music, tickling one's heart-strings.

Everything else was as perfect as we could make it. Of course there were faults, defects; I realise that we'd do better now. But still——" He paused, with a little jerk of his head, staring out in front of him.

"You—you went up in her?"

Fulton nodded, his jaw was set. "Went up—oh, yes, went up!" he said; then added grimly: "Went up, and came down again."

"I say"—Susie almost whispered the words, it seemed as though there was a lump stuck in her throat—"I"—she put out one hand and touched the back of his—"I say, I am sorry—what rotten, what perfectly rotten luck!"

"Thanks—awfully." Fulton's voice was hoarse; then he pulled himself together with a shrug of his shoulders, turned and faced her, grinning; though both pairs of young eyes—the odd light grey with the short sandy lashes, the deep blue with the wide black pupils—were suspiciously moist and shining. "Well, it was a jar—in more ways than one. A jar? Good lord! a demi-john! But I suppose they'd say I was lucky to escape with my life. Now, look here, don't you think I've told you pretty well enough about myself? What about you—your quest?"

"I?" said Susie. "Oh, well, I suppose I've come a—well, a sort of a bit of a cropper too. Not like yours; I've never got high enough for that, anyway; more like Humpty Dumpty. But still, when one thinks, when one is perfectly sure that one can do a thing, it's—it's——"

"Like putting your foot into the wrong boot."

"And tight, horribly tight—someone else's boot. I suppose that's it—the worst part, anyhow. When we set out to do a thing it's our own thing, done in our own way, that we want. When we come back failures, ten to one there's nothing left but somebody else's 'thing,' done in somebody else's way; it seems as though one was everlastingly being squeezed into other people's boots in that fashion. I dare say it seems all right to them. I dare say they feel of just as much importance to themselves—as much 'I' to themselves as I am 'I' to myself. But

still—— Oh, well, there's nothing left. That's what it comes to." She leant forward, her hands clasped between her knees, desperate, despairing, perfectly certain that never, never again could life be even remotely worth living.

"I might as well be dead. I never succeed in anything I want to do." Gone, clean swept away, was every memory of former triumphs: the strike she had headed against suet puddings, the scholarship for French—after all, where was the use of learning French when French people were such asses as not to understand what you said? "Everything's hopeless. Nothing—nothing's any use, nobody cares! I only wish the rotten old steamer would strike a mine!"

"Thanks," said Fulton; "burning our Rome to cook your chop!"

CHAPTER XXVI

Both Treherne and D'Eath speculated a good deal over what they called "the Phillips affair." Plan as they might they could see no way out of the position in which Alf—after all so much more innocent than 'Rene, who always seemed most innocent—had landed himself between the two women: come to any definite conclusion as to what would happen upon his return. Still, whenever they were tired and bored with other things they found themselves reverting to the same problem, endeavouring to solve it; fascinated by it as work-wearied men may be by a double acrostic; arranging and re-arranging the future of all concerned.

But Fate takes pleasure in checkmating all such endeavours. The jade has no reverence, would play an April fool's trick with a mother at her child's grave, delights in anything like an anticlimax. Thus the old playwrights showed their knowledge when they mingled buffoonery with tragedy; if one really wishes to make sure that the ill-bred cocotte will not jump out and cry "boo!" in the midst of the deepest emotions, the gravest scenes, she must be given some definite part.

Alf's home life "after the war" was discussed from every possible standpoint; both women were unselfishly bent on giving him up to each other, loving Alf and yet in an odd way counting him out, so far as his own personal choice was concerned. Then, after all—and it seemed as though the man himself might have sniggered over the solution—it appeared that Alf was not to come home at all, and a telegram was sent apprising his wife of the fact.

"Killed in action." That was what it said.

There was very little correspondence addressed to Fourteen Chatham Row; nothing, in fact, beyond Alf's own letters, which were shared by both Mrs. Phillipses, opened by either.

As the telegram arrived during the afternoon it was "the Kipper" who received it and brought it round to D'Eath.

Going downstairs, in answer to O'Hagan's summons, D'Eath found her hovering upon the threshold of the hall, looking as though she had been blown there by that sort of wind which drives dust and straws into London doorways; drab, meagre, red-eyed, one of those strange, draggle-plumed birds one sees in the East End, who flutter apologetically through life, just as they flutter their broken-winged way through the streets; always upon the inner side of the pavement, close against the wall, hesitating long, with their shawls drawn tightly around them, at each crossing; heralded by no brisk tap of heels; moving inaudibly, save in the most deserted highways when a faint dragging shuffle catches the ear. It seemed amazing to think of any such women "living in sin," as the moralists would call it, knowing anything of temptation, passion—an object of desire, bearing a child.

'Rene would have brought her in at the door, caught her up, sweeping her along by sheer force of her own buoyant, robust life. But alone she could get no farther than the doorpost, clung to it with one hand, holding out the telegram in the other.

"Alf's dead!" She spoke with a dragging, resentful drawl which might have been taken for indifference. "First the kid—now 'im! I was wonderin' if yer'd go an' tell 'Rene. She oughter know. She can't go on sellin' flowers wiv 'er 'usban' dead an' all. 'E was 'er man—'e belonged ter 'er. But there yer are—'e's dead!"

There was a long pause. "I'm very, very sorry to hear it," said D'Eath; but she took no notice of his words.

"I daren't not go. She might be comin' 'ome early

an' me miss 'er. Besides, I don't not rightly know my way about them parts. If yer think as 'ow yer could——" She spoke tentatively, glancing at him sideways, with drooping head, dragging her shawl tighter around her thin shoulders; her face was long and dully opaque, her eyes unbrightened by tears, but the corners of her loose mouth twitched. "'E was 'er man by rights, dontcher see; set on 'im, as I might be."

"Of course I will go. Shall I take this?" The woman nodded, and D'Eath placed the telegram in his pocket-book. "Now, won't you see Miss Villiers; let her give you a cup of tea?"

"Thank yer kindly, but I reckon I'd better be gettin' back. I don't rightly feel as 'ow I wants ter see nobody. It's a sorter knock-down; there ain't no mistake about that. Sorter ways the end——" She hesitated, rubbing one finger up and down the edge of the door, gazing at it curiously. "I suppose as 'ow it's certain sure? I suppose as 'ow there can't not be no mistake?—but then it ain't not likely, what with the expense of that there telegram an' all—as it were another bloke an' not Alf?" Again she paused, her doleful mouth drawn tight.

"I'm afraid not, but I can make inquiries if you like, see whether I can get any particulars——"

"No, I wouldn't like ter trouble yer ter do that. I reckon what that there telegram says is true; an' if 'e's dead 'e's dead, an' there ain't no more ter be said. Eh, well, I suppose I'd better be movin' on; there ain't nuffin' ter be done, won't never be, not no more. Eh, dear, but this 'ere war's a shockin' thing, no funeral, no nuffin'. I"—her eyes became suffused with red, she dragged her shawl across her mouth—"I didn't not 'ave 'im long, an' 'e weren't never not rightly mine—not by law an' not by feelin' neither, along o' 'im thinkin' so constant o' 'Rene. But there ain't no woman in the world as could 'a' studied 'im more than I did, though I——" Once more her words tailed off, as though she had used them all up; while she turned her eyes from the edge of the

door and fixed them upon D'Eath with the puzzled, inarticulate misery of a wounded animal.

"After all," he said—and wondered directly the words were out of his mouth what his brother Horace, what his own son, would have thought of them—"there was the child. Don't you think that made him yours, just as much as 'Rene's?"

For a moment a wintry gleam of pleasure crossed her face. Then she let the shawl fall from her mouth, twisted into a smile which was almost derisive. "That ain't no good! Yer means well, and thank yer, but 'Rene's kid was first, an' it's the first as counts. A man's scared over 'is first in a way 'e ain't over the others, an' that tells. But there, yer'll let 'er know, poor dear. I ain't got nuffin' against 'Rene. 'Rene's stood by me—there ain't nuffin' as I'd grudge to 'Rene. No, not even the weeds—crepe weeds nor nuffin'. For it's like this, yer see: I'd 'a' lost 'im sooner nor I did if 'Rene 'adn't not stood by me."

Moving in a dream, full of thoughts of the two women, of the man who was gone, D'Eath mounted the wrong bus, found himself obliged to get off it at Charing Cross.

For a while he stood on the pavement hesitating. It seemed scarcely worth while to catch another; he could easily walk up through Trafalgar Square and so on to Piccadilly Circus.

But it was a hot day, moist and thunder-laden. His heart did not trouble him nearly so much as it had done, for Treherne's diagnosis had been correct; still, any worry or shock brought back the old feeling of intense fatigue, particularly when the weather was heavy and overcast.

After all, what was the use of dragging up that hill? Besides, time was precious, and he did not want to miss 'Rene.

He turned and looked along the Strand to see what buses were in sight. He had been too engrossed in his thoughts to feel the slightest fear of meeting anyone he

knew; as a matter of fact, his old life, all that belonged to it, seemed to have receded into the far distance. So much had happened since he left Dene Royal, was still happening, or in front of him.

Thus the first sight of a girlish figure in a blue serge coat and skirt, coming out of the station gates, suit-case in hand, found him little more than vaguely puzzled, still in a dream, conscious only that it reminded him of, was like, curiously like, someone he knew—Susie. Was it Susie?

In common with us all he had the defects of his qualities. Sensitive, gentle, kind, his interests and affections flowed in upon him afresh each day. After all, how little there had ever been to rivet his love, for that is the outcome of one's own necessity, one's closeness to the person loved; and how little had he seen of his youngest daughter; how little had she, or any one of them, ever appeared to need him?

There was a perceptible interval before he even thought "A girl like Susie—a girl who might be Susie; only"—then the girl turned her head, stood with her back to him. Her hair was done up—untidily; she looked tired, bewildered, drooped a little. Susie was so trim in her schoolgirl way, so confident, almost rakish in her every movement, wore her hair in a plait with a big bow. This girl, now—his glance dropped, one brown stocking sagged loosely round the ankle. Of course, it couldn't be Susie. Susie would never have her stocking like that. Still—still—he was as bewildered as a man awakening from a dream.

The girl moved to the edge of the pavement and turned her head, first one way and then the other; not as though she were looking for anything in particular, rather as though she were trying to make up her mind. Anyhow, a girl like that had no business alone, and so evidently at a loss, tired to indifference; it was not safe. If his daughter Susie—he moved a step nearer. For the first time a slow, dejected turn of the girl's head—if he had but known it she was trying to remember the best way to Bloomsbury,

where she had been taken to the British Museum, told of boarding-houses almost adjoining it, every bit as antique —brought into full sight the pure oval of the face, the blue eyes, heavy with fatigue, and he realised that it *was* Susie. Actually Susie herself! Oddly changed—with his quick perception for subtleties he realised this—but still Susie.

His first thought was of flight, but wonder led his feet. Even after the first thought of her actual identity had come to him he still advanced, staring, like a half-fascinated child. By the time that he was sure of her there was scarcely a yard between them, and it was too late to retreat; for the next turn of her head brought them face to face.

Even then D'Eath had an idea that he might, after all, be mistaken, for her face bleached so that she seemed a different creature from the warm-coloured girl he had known —after all, so little.

They drew another step nearer to one another. If D'Eath himself was bewildered, fascinated, she was even more so, scared into the bargain, her eyes wide. Both hands were full, with suit-case, umbrella, hand-bag, or she would certainly have put out one to touch him, see if he were real. Susie was like that; she would have poked at a ghost, however frightened she might be, just to make sure.

"Father!" she came closer, their faces were almost touching. She looked so white, shaken, almost awestruck, that he was afraid what might happen. In Wapping it would have been hysterics, a scene; what did girls like this do in moments of emotion—faint?

His fear gave him coolness, a sudden inspiration.

"Hallo! 'Pine-processional?'" he said; and Susie broke into a weak giggle, dropped her suit-case at her feet and caught his arm.

"Goodness gracious! It is you, really you? If this doesn't beat creation! And only to think—if I had got to Nauheim——"

"What—you?"

"I went—I started, I mean—I meant to go to find you! And all this time you—you——" She was very tired, desperately in want of her tea, and her giggles overcame her. "And all the time—you—you—— Oh, you sort of Peter Pan, you!"

D'Eath hailed a taxi and put her into it, bade the man drive round Trafalgar Square until he was told to stop; then, seating himself at her side, took her hand.

"Look here, Susie, there's an awful lot to tell you, but it will have to wait. Anyhow, I'm not at Nauheim."

"That's a sheer waste of words." The girl was recovering herself. "Just fancy, if I had gone there—but how in the world did you get back?"

"I didn't go at all."

"Didn't go? But the letters——"

D'Eath glanced sideways at his daughter with an air of desperate depression, shame; only to think if it had been Mary! "Well, nothing matters now. It's all over *now*, I suppose. I——"

"I like that; you think I'll tell. I——!" Her indignation was broken by a titter. "After all, you're not the only one to have run away."

"What—you?"

She nodded, flushed with excitement. "Me—me too. Oh, what sucks to those others!—the true, the only Processionals! The ring's broken——"

"But, my dear, with you, a young girl——"

Susie turned, lifted a small thumb in a black glove that had once been white. "See that?" She laughed delightedly. "See that? I've got you under it; no good trying to play the heavy father with me. And now—my word, what wouldn't I give for some tea!"

"You'll have to wait." He told her something of his mission to 'René and her face sobered. He had been right in that first impression of her; she had changed, was capable of feeling things in a new way.

"If she cared for him—it must be too awful to care for somebody like that, and then lose them." She spoke almost as though she knew what it might mean. And then: "When you get out to fetch her I'll make the man shut the taxi."

"But why, a hot day like this?"

"She'll like to cry in peace, poor dear; if she wants to cry, if she can cry."

CHAPTER XXVII

"Of course she must go home; we'll have to own up, both of us," remarked D'Eath, conscious that he was bolstering up his own strength of mind by what he took it for granted that Treherne would say.

But Treherne said nothing. As usual after supper he was deep in his chair by the open window, smoking, hugging an all too brief peace. Mrs. Wing Sen had expressed her firm intention of sending round for him again. She had already sent three times, and he had obeyed the summons; but nothing had happened, though she was in a dangerous condition, knew it and took a pride in it. "There's some as 'ave a babby as easy as winkin', but that's not me," she would boast; "it 'ud turn yer 'air white if I was ter start out ter tell yer the awful way as I've suffered, the things as I've been through with my four—cross births an' all. Them there lidies as 'ave their kids wiv no more trouble, less than a day's washing—just for all the world like rabbits, though I says it as shouldn't—they don't know what a sensitive female is put to."

O'Hagan was scornful. "Let 'er squeal!" that's what he would say when an anxious-faced Sen child came running for the doctor, with an awful tale of how his mother was taking on. "Shriekin' out sumfing awful, enuf ter make yer blood run cold."

"Any woman as marries a Chink—*marries* 'im, mind yer—oughter suffer, an' I don't mind if she is yer mother; there's no gettin' over 'o's yer daddy, she's got *'er* married lines wrote down plain an' darned ugly in the faces o' all you kids, no mistake about that! For what woman as

was a woman 'ud 'ave more nor one kid by a Chink if she weren't not tied to 'im—arsk me another?"

Susie was sitting on the window-sill craning out, watching the arrogant ways of a tug with a four-masted sailing-ship which caught the wind all sideways, moved sulkily; her canvas tight round her yards—like a thin woman with her arms rolled in her apron; slithering along like—well, just like "the Kipper," of whom she had caught a glimpse that evening when they took 'Rene home in their taxi—'Rene weeping in an utter abandonment of grief, with her head upon Susie's slim shoulder.

Susie was a difficulty; D'Eath realised this with a half-whimsical sense of the fatality which always hangs round anything one likes; but if she were not a difficulty what a companion she might have been! It was amazing how she had found the right words for 'Rene; her calm acceptance of the case, as, on their way to the pier-head house, D'Eath had unfolded it to her—very shyly, wondering how much young girls might be supposed to know.

"Right an' wrong's all a queer sort of mix up," said Susie. "Of course, it was frightfully wrong of 'Rene to run away from Alf, to start off with—I suppose her real name's Irene, the same as your Irene." She broke off, coolly disassociating herself from the family. "But if she had not done it, ten to one the other woman would never have had any sort of a chance, so there you are."

"It's out of the question to keep a young girl here," went on D'Eath, as Treherne, puffing steadily at his pipe, volunteered no remark. "Then there's Mary to be thought of. Oh, it would never do!"

"The priest's sheets smell of onions; I noticed it when I made up the bed," remarked Susie, with apparent carelessness; for after one long, steady glance at her O'Hagan had sighed deeply, then departed, without a word, in search of borrowed bed linen.

"The ship's out of sight! Odd how the night comes

down here, like a hand closing, quite gently, over everything—a grey frill dropping over its wrist." For a moment she paused, pleased by her own fancy, then began again: "I asked O'Hagan if I couldn't go down the river on one of those barges—what a card he is! 'Yer can't that!' he said; then when I asked why, the only reason he could give was that we might be out all night. Such nonsense! It doesn't seem much just going down the river to Gravesend or Tilbury after going to France all alone, does it? And I don't see why I—— Oh, look here, O'Hagan!"

O'Hagan had entered the room on silent padding feet, was lighting the lamp. He had never quite got over his rejection, but all the same he had learnt to wear it with an air, like a feather in his cap. "It's a blamed wonder as I'm alive at all, that's what they all tell me," he would declare with pride.

"Even if we were out on the barge all night, what would it matter? I could take food, a rug; I'm used to looking after myself."

"Yer can't go a-cause there ain't not no sort o' accommodation, I've told yer that already." O'Hagan turned and looked at the girl severely, as one might look at any over-insistent child.

"I don't see——"

"No, yer don't see; 'cause why, yer don't know enuf ter see. Yer ain't not born yet, not in a manner o' speakin'."

"I like that. I——"

"'Aven't I told yer yer can't go; there ain't no sorter accommodation? Why can't yer take the word o' one as knows better nor you do? There ain't no room for females aboard them wherries. Look 'ere, yer'd best tell 'er, or we won't not 'ave no peace; I know them sorts." O'Hagan gave a jerk of his great chin in D'Eath's direction, indicating Susie with his thumb. "It ain't my place ter enlighten 'er, but it's like this; she can't not go—'cause why, there ain't no sorter room, an' she'd 'ave ter sleep

wiv the captin. That's as sure as eggs is eggs, and if she don't 'ave it plain out she won't take it, not from you nor from me, nor from no one else, neither. I know 'er sort, by Gawd I do!"

"There," said D'Eath pettishly as the ex-prize-fighter slid from the room, "that will show you, Treherne. It's no place for a young girl. What would Mary say, what would they all think? No, no, we'll have to go home, own up, no matter what you say."

"I? I said nothing."

"No, but you might have said something; it's all a confounded muddle. You and that girl——" D'Eath paused. After all Treherne had *said* nothing; it was only somehow, quite vaguely in the air, that he and Susie were siding with each other. He was exasperated with him, with Susie, most of all with himself, the way he seemed to be forced into upholding the very conventionalities which he hated.

Susie slipped from her seat on the window-sill; there was a distinct increase of colour in her face, but her eyes were alight with amusement. "If anyone can lend me some paper and an envelope, I've got my own fountain-pen; there's a letter I want to write," she said.

At this D'Eath also moved forward into the circle of light, glancing at her unhappily, like a suspicious child—Treherne was busy at a side table, collecting odds and ends from a cupboard, putting them into his bag—even if the confession had to be made there was no need to be in such a hurry about it. That was just like a woman! No sooner had the thought formed itself than he squirmed; it was exactly what the Squire of Thorns always said: "You women!" "Just like women!" Oh yes, he was precisely the same as all of them. *Had* to be, that was the very mischief of it!

"What do you want to write?" said D'Eath. His voice dragged. He was depressed almost to tears by the very thought of taking up that old life which had never suited him; had always, in its elaborate littleness,

seemed too much for him. "Why should you write—to-night?"

"Only just to send someone my address."

"It's no good sending anyone your address—from here. Even that friend of yours—Rosie what's-her-name?—she would let them know. They would all come up. They'd say—oh, you know what they'd say!" D'Eath spoke almost angrily; then his voice dropped to the old note of appeal. "Best leave it for to-night. Though, of course, I know we've got to go back, sooner or later—to-morrow by rights, I suppose."

"Go back? To-morrow! Not if I know it! To please nobody, not even ourselves? That's what you've been doing all your life, just lying down, letting them wipe their feet on you. Oh, don't think I don't know—haven't I seen it? But, anyhow, this letter has nothing to do with *them*, or Rosie either; I've left all that behind. It's to a friend of my own——" She hesitated, staring rather hardly at her father, on the defensive against that sort of questioning which all young people hate. "A friend I made for myself—worth every one of them put together, so there!"

"Ah, well," said D'Eath, turning a little sideways, one shoulder higher than the other, stuttering a trifle in his delicate endeavour to disclaim any undue interest in his daughter's friends. "Blood, and all that; it's all very well in its way—very nice. But sometimes, don't you know, sometimes it's too sticky, and sometimes it's too thin, and, after all, it's chosen for us. Anyhow—well, there's nothing in the world like a friend of one's own—not choosing, that sounds too deliberate—but one's own finding, not even introduced——" Susie glanced up quickly with flushed face, but her father's gaze had slid past her, was resting upon Treherne's back—"just chanced upon."

D'Eath and Treherne thrashed out the whole question of Susie late that night, long after she herself was fast asleep between the odoriferous sheets.

It had been past twelve before the doctor got back.

"Upon my soul, D'Eath, one might imagine that the woman did it on purpose," he said. "If there is any single complication in what ought to be a perfectly simple process with a female of that calibre, she's certain sure to hit upon it. I sometimes think that Wing, with those eyes of his—a slant and a cast and a leer—must have overlooked her."

He picked up a grimy glove which lay upon the table and stared at it gravely; then straightened it out, laid it down with a curiously lingering touch, leant forward in his chair and poured out a cup of the almost black tea which O'Hagan had put ready for him.

"I wonder that stuff doesn't keep you awake."

"Nothing makes any difference. I sleep or don't sleep —not much, anyhow. I'm worried out of my life, that's the truth of it, D'Eath. The Lord knows there's enough for me to do here, more than any one man can get through, particularly now without Nurse Fenton, who understood the ropes." Nurse Fenton had left for France a little more than a week earlier. "Upon my soul, there are times when I don't know which way to turn; what it's safest to leave undone, that's what it comes to. Oh, yes, I know I'm frightfully needed here; there's the next generation to think of, the re-making of the race, and it's not the job for an elderly man in a rough place like this. All the same, my conscience won't let me alone. I can't tell you what it meant to let that girl go and see myself sticking here in safety; and yet half the time I felt that even she had no business to go, as though her venturing were half shirking. Talk of virtue being its own reward! What can a fellow make of it when he's doing the things he believes to be right, hates doing, and yet feels that it's altogether wrong? There's no man worth his salt who wouldn't rather be out at the front than anywhere else just now, particularly a man of my profession—look at the experience of it, apart from anything else. If it was a matter of inclination I'd be off to-morrow."

"If one could only be sure what was right, life would be pretty simple."

"You feel it too. By Jove, how this war is altering things, mixing up one's values!" Treherne leant back in his chair, his pipe between his teeth, stretching out his long legs with the half-pained relief of an over-tired man; then picked up Susie's glove again, frowned at it with an absent air, and folded it neatly, smoothing out the creases. "That girl of yours, D'Eath, she was always different. I remember thinking that when she was the merest child."

"She's nothing but a child now."

"Not she. Most girls of her age would be, I grant that. In her station they nip 'em off, keep 'em back until every natural feeling, every impulse is atrophied. But Susie's a reversion—a primitive. It 'ud be no use trying to keep her potted down; she'd break out, spill all over the place. She's bound to have room to spread, or there'll be trouble."

"It's difficult to know what to do, what it is girls want. There's my second daughter. She was mad for a higher education—college; she's had it all, but she's done nothing with it—except talk."

"D'Eath, look here, there's one thing I'm certain sure of. Life's the only sort of college for a woman, an' she'll get a deuce of a deal out of it too; garner up her smallest patch of wild oats, pass it all on. They yap about the higher education, but they don't know what to do with it when they've got it; for all that sort of thing's impersonal, and they're intensely personal. They can't mix up the two lives like a man; they warp all one way or another. If they haven't got a baby to hug they'll hug a cat or a Pekinese. Half the women in the world become cranks simply because they are kept back from the natural life at the very time nature had them ripe, and not over-ripe, for it. Look at all this outcry against war-weddings, boy-and-girl weddings, everything done in a hurry! Well, that's natural—that's the way it ought to be. 'The very idea

of children of your age falling in love!' That's what people say, having extended childhood to an altogether artificial length; flying straight in the face of nature, who's explicit enough there, the Lord knows. You can't play any of those sort of hanky-panky tricks with Susie; she's a woman and she knows it, and the boys will know it too. Good God, it sometimes makes me sick to see the way you people save your daughters for some middle-aged, worn-out man of the world. Down here pretty well every boy's married before he's two-and-twenty; the girls before they're twenty. Oh yes, you all throw up your hands in despair over these improvident marriages; but it's not the marriage that's at fault, it's the patchy way in which civilisation really considers, cares for its citizens."

"It's all very well for you to talk, but they'll pack Susie off to school again directly I get her back—and I shan't dare to interfere."

"You're a coward, D'Eath."

"I know I am. Still, there's an old saying which declares it better to be sure than sorry, and it's a dangerous thing to play tricks with a young girl's life."

"My dear fellow! Isn't that what you all do, have been doing for centuries, 'playing tricks'?"

"Well, I suppose she's got to be educated," persisted D'Eath weakly, finding a sort of comfort in repeating what other people—whom he did not in the least agree with—had said upon the subject.

"Educated for what? Look here, my friend, if we don't want to be wiped out in the next big war, it's a school for mothers that we want. Anyhow, she'll learn more of real life here in a month than she'll ever learn in any school."

"It's the neighbourhood—at her age."

"It seems to me that she's just the right age. She won't see far enough to be broken down with it, and she'll be learning so much all at the same time that one-half of it will slide off her back. Look here, D'Eath, it comes

to this"—Treherne leant forward, emphasising his words with the stem of his pipe upon his open hand—"there's been a fresh swing of the pendulum since your other daughter insisted upon college, clamoured for equal rights with men. If the women get the vote now they'll trouble precious little about it. The quite new ones don't want that sort of thing: they want to be certain sure of their own rights as women. You let that girl of yours have it all ways—ministering angel and all that business which we fools had got into the way of laughing at. Anyhow, stay on here for a week or so, see how it works. She'll be safe enough—safer than in the West End—alone, and she's got to learn to go alone. There's no time, or ought to be no time, for spoon-feeding anyone in these days. Miss Villiers will have an eye to her. Well, look here, it hasn't hurt her much, and yet she's been down here every day of her life for pretty well ten years, was here when I came. She's not trained like Nurse Fenton, but upon my word there's precious little about the human soul that girl doesn't know: besides, she's a lady—there's no manner of doubt about that—'county,' too, I believe, and little as I ever thought it of you, D'Eath, I believe that's a fact which will serve to make you easier in your mind at this juncture." Treherne grinned. "How are the mighty fallen—'The county!' Oh, well, I suppose it's got to be, carries its own consolation—like rum and true religion, both good in moderation, strictly in moderation!"

"Well, it seems to me—I speak as an amateur, after all this is the first time I've ever had the chance of deciding anything for any one of my children—that parentage forces one to a sort of damned reiteration. Take all the declamations against public schools: people still enter their sons the week they're born. The maddest bohemians, artists, socialists, love to send their boys to Eton. We get frightened, lose our nerve; it's a sort of stutter of heredity—an echo."

"Well, you've tried it with—Lord, how many children

have you, D'Eath?—a round dozen or so—let Miss Susie go free; tear out that insane root of habit, just for this once; keep it for your grandchildren. As to your great-grandchildren, there's no knowing what we may be by the time they're ready to be educated: running wild—woad the only wear, likely enough. Just woad—all memory of synthetic dyes clean wiped out. It's well within the bounds of possibility that this war may go on until every nation's drawn into it. People will forget what they're fighting for, who were their original enemies. All the allied nations will go back on each other, the most loosely knit and idealistic—what Miss Susie would describe as 'the sloppy ones'—first. Then there'll be revolutions, civil war, guerilla warfare. All arts and literature will be bound to go; no one will have time or thought for anything save the bare necessities of life; drama—drama of a spectacular sort, lewd or murderous, will hang out the longest; then that'll go, too. Science will fizzle out, industry—all these things need something of the communistic spirit, and there will be no chance of that with every man at his neighbour's throat. There will be nothing grown save what each man can scratch out for himself upon his own particular hill-side. Why hill-side? Well, a man won't dare to work in any place where he's likely to be overlooked, will choose a point of vantage, his back to some sort of wall. Ten to one he won't work at all, but see his squaw do it while he watches, lazes, fights. There will be no manufactories, because there will be no labour, no raw material; even if such things were attempted, started, the output would be stolen or destroyed before it could be finished.

"Nations have gone to pieces like that again and again. Why not a conglomeration of nations, the whole world? Picture your descendants, D'Eath, 'County' still, but of the earth, earthy: heavy-browed, naked, suspicious, prowling; thinly scattered because of the chances against any woman bringing her child to a safe birth. A wild beast or so escaped from a menagerie—a single bomb might do it—and England overrun with bears, wolves. I'm not joking,

D'Eath, 'pon my soul I'm not. It's not a matter for joking. Sometimes I seem to see it——" Treherne had been walking up and down the room as he spoke. Now he moved to the window, pulled aside a corner of the blind and peered out. "Here now, for instance, the river walls all broken, naked men in their coracles fishing amid the swamps. Oh, it won't begin in England, we've the habit of order. Nor in France either, they know too well what revolution means, the sort of beast man becomes without law and order—without even the tribal honour of savages; for a convert to savagery is like every other convert—out-herods Herod. But when it once gets started it will spread like wildfire. First the prostitution of nations by paid agitators, then anarchy, plunder, murder, rape, starvation. And mind you, D'Eath, starvation among a people is like frost in a wall, it splits and crumbles in every conceivable fashion, spreads its long cracks almost beyond the bounds of imagination—,—"

Here Treherne broke off with the uneasy laugh of a man who has been carried out of himself. "Good heavens, what an oration! Do you know that it's just on two o'clock? What did it all start with? That girl of yours"—he turned, blinking a little in the light of the lamp, his eyes bright and troubled, as those of a man who has looked upon some dark vision—"I must be mad, but things seem to have been getting upon my nerves lately. The result of being pulled too many ways all at once, I suppose; feeling oneself, the whole world, so absolutely incapable of grappling with things as they are—worse still, as they're going to be. But all the same there was some method in my effusion—or anyhow in what it started out to be. For what we stand to need more than anything else in the years before us is endurance and competence in the handling of the common things of life. The bringing up of our children, if we have them; the filling of some real need. No more tinkling on the piano, sketching from nature, the sort of thing the barren and unmated masses used, much as a bereaved mother uses poppy heads upon her breasts. It was all well enough in its way, but we're bound to get back to the hard facts of life before we've done

with this. Even Mrs. Sen—well, she is doing something; anyhow more than that Mrs. What-do-you-call-her you told me of, with her fool birds' nests; doing it in the damndest, awkwardest way imaginable, but still doing it. I thought of that this evening, and I tell you I needed something of the sort to help me through."

CHAPTER XXVIII

TIME slipped on, and Hugh D'Eath came to no special conclusion respecting the course which he ought to pursue. It was as Treherne said: directly you did the thing which seemed right it had a chameleon-like habit of becoming wrong: if you deliberately did wrong you were still tormented by the thought of what would certainly have been right—until you tried it. Only in the second instance you pleased yourself and in the first you pleased nobody; least of all that grinning, sub-conscious self which poses, at one moment as conscience—a conscience worthy of a schoolmarm—and at another shows itself in its true light as the ribald egger-on, the instigator, of every sort of mischief.

After all, thought D'Eath, supposing that he did go home with Susie, make his confession, there would be an endless series of scenes, recriminations. Of course it was the right, the only thing to do. But then, was it? No sooner had he made his mind up on this point than he was confronted by the uselessness of sacrificing himself, Susie, the confusion which would be caused by such a reappearance.

For all intents and purposes he was comfortably settled in Nauheim, and everybody was contented. Sometimes he wished that he were as comfortably dead as the man in Arnold Bennett's book "Buried Alive"; though even that happiness did not last. D'Eath's sub-conscious self, for the moment Puritanical, told him that nothing in the way of deception could last; though, even then, he was obliged to suppress his memory of cases in which it had been an undoubted success.

Still, the whole affair slid. Susie, with infinite tact, took everything for granted; allowed nothing to be put into words more definite than "Oh, well, we shall see." It was the

one trick she had learnt from Mary, in her own way every bit as obstinate as her young sister. She was careful not to arouse any spirit of opposition in her father. When he said "We must go home," she agreed with him: upon which he immediately began to wonder why they should do anything of the sort.

Meanwhile her life slipped into a sort of routine, which gave them both a sense of security. She helped her father in the adjustment of matrimonial quarrels, for D'Eath had become an adept at this sort of thing, was also regarded as a high authority in any legal matters, such as the position of Mrs. Flanagan, who had emptied a slop-bucket out of her own window—her own window, mind you, and where else should she empty it?—upon the head of the one-time Mrs. Muller, who threatened the extremest penalties of the law. She also took Nurse Fenton's place in keeping Treherne's surgery clean and tidy for him, and accompanied Miss Villiers on her rounds. More than once she had gone off alone, made some patient comfortable for the night when the elder woman was more than usually rushed. She was a great deal too cocksure, took far too much upon herself; but she was thoroughly contented, there was no mistake about that, and the corners were wearing off her.

Lucelle Villiers, quiet, observant, a little mocking in a tolerant sort of fashion, had her share in smoothing her out; she never had to speak twice on any question of dress or dignity, important matters in Wapping, for Susie had a shrewd idea that she would never trouble to do so, would just leave her alone, and she dreaded this. Nothing impresses the young, the raw and jerky, more than poise: and in this particular Miss Villiers was perfect.

But that was not the only influence at work upon Susie. One day, going into her room for something, D'Eath saw a young man's photo propped against the looking-glass; she received numerous letters, which she put in her pocket unopened with a vivid blush.

At first she had tried to waylay the postman. Then finding that no one remarked upon her correspondence she

took to receiving it openly. Sometimes O'Hagan would say: "Pretty constant 'and with the pen, ain't 'e?"—but O'Hagan did not count. In a matter like this everyone had the right to banter excepting a relation. If her father had said anything she would have been up in arms at once.

But he said nothing; and after a while she began to resent this as showing lack of interest. The letters became less frequent, displaying the field postmark. But still D'Eath said nothing, for he had the happy faculty of remembering his own youth, his own self-consciousness—worn raw by the comments of a large family—even now more sensitive than Susie's could ever be.

Susie's secretiveness was far less deeply rooted than his own, because she was more certain that everything she did was right. Very shortly she began openly to brandish her letters: gave forth her opinions on military affairs backed by "A man I know says——": more than once she declared with meaning that she was too worried for anything. "You people don't seem to realise, in the very least, what it's like out there: what war really means."

Then came a considerable interval with no letter; ten days or more—during which Susie sought comfort, not from Miss Villiers, whom she believed to have a soul above such things, nor from Treherne, in whose company she seemed to have developed a sort of watchfulness, an attitude as though poised for flight—but from her father, whom she knew to be romantic, who read poetry.

By this time they had a fire each evening in the round-windowed room at the pier house. Tea, since Susie's advent, had grown to be a sort of ritual, instead of just one cup with a damp slice of bread and butter in the saucer.

Susie loved a real tea, with bread and butter and cake; she made toast by the fire. If there was any chance of Treherne joining them a lavish slice was covered with butter and kept hot between two plates on the old-fashioned hob. For the girl was unceasingly anxious for his comfort—despite that lift of the wings.

She launched forth upon her confidence suddenly, in-

coherently; on the hearthrug at her father's feet, the fire poked and raked to a fine redness. "Of course, if anyone was killed somebody would write to the person *he* wrote to most, particularly if he carried her—oh, well, his, its—anybody's—letters next his—in his breast pocket—unless they were shot away, unless—anyhow, it would be in the paper if anyone was wounded or missing."

"It's sometimes very difficult to find time to write."

"Oh, yes, perhaps, with some people; they'll let any old thing come in the way. But this isn't at all that sort of person. I don't suppose you've noticed, but I did get letters—awfully regularly! I can tell you, he's the sort to stick to a thing. He's——"

After that it was all out. She had met him during that wild goose chase. Japheta in search of a father. "Anyhow, I owe you that much, you old dear," she said, and squeezed back against her father's knees, rubbing a hot cheek upon his hand, generously allowing him "that much." "If it hadn't been for thinking you were in Nauheim we mightn't have run against each other for ages. Though of course we should have met: it was all pre—what do you call it? I knew that directly I saw him." Here Susie's memory, rather than her veracity, failed her, gone all remembrance of that meditated gift, of a white feather. "What is it? —oh, pre-ordained! Of course, when it is the real thing, absolutely *the* thing, *the* person, there can be no mistake, can there?" It appeared that he had been obliged to stay in Folkestone that first day, the day she had met her father. Almost directly afterwards he had gone out to France, with his "old mouse-trap of a motor-bike."

D'Eath knew when the young man's exact words were being repeated by the inflection of Susie's voice; it became apparent that he used less slang than she did. They had written, and written—and written. Of course they had come to know each other better like that; but anyhow they were sure, quite sure. "He won't have any sort of engagement, because he says that I'm only a kid." D'Eath wondered what would have happened if he had dared to voice such an

idea. "But of course we both know that nothing, nothing in the whole world can keep us apart. I'm quite sure of him, and of course I'm absolutely certain that I will never—could never change."

"Upon my word, of course you're very young and all that—but I don't think you will, you're not the sort." D'Eath was sure of it; for all her waywardness there was something stable about Susie, a real backbone. He believed in her absolutely, was thrilled to his heart's core; here at last was love, the sort of love which he had always dreamt of, as romantic as he could wish it to be. He absolutely pooh-poohed all idea of them waiting until they were "as old as old," as Susie put it; one could always rub along somehow, and life together might be such a lark when one was still young enough to play, to make-believe. He was told the whole story of that gallant aeroplane affair; did not say that the young man was hopelessly rash, not fit to be trusted with a wife, as ninety-nine grown-ups out of a hundred would have done, only: "Come, now, that *is* the sort of fellow for a lover!" He inquired as to the colour of his prospective son-in-law's hair, and remarked with delight that it showed the truth of the old adage, "Ginger for pluck!"—but he never even thought of asking what the young couple expected to live upon.

"He's only a sort of an oldish boy himself," thought Susie, looking up and seeing his flushed face, shining eyes. In love as she was, it made her feel, not exactly superior, but mature; how could she know that he had been waiting for a love affair—anyone's so long as it were the real thing—for the best part of thirty years?

They were still talking when Treherne came in and picked a blackened slice of bread out of the grate; following Susie with his eyes when she slipped from the room with some muttered excuse about washing her hands.

Late that evening they were all sitting round the fire after supper. The autumnal gales had begun, and the wind was booming up the river, broken by the deep, plaintive note of the sirens, like prehistoric river beasts bellowing for their

young. The tide was coming in and the ships with it, even Susie was river-wise enough to know that by now; following the sound of siren, steam tug and police whistle, the slap of waves against the quay, the creaking pull of anchored barges.

The girl had some sewing in her lap, a lamentable attempt at a nightgown for the latest Sen infant; but she had forgotten it, was staring into the fire, with a tender half smile upon her face.

A pregnant, significant silence lay heavy upon the warm room, intensified by the turmoil outside. Treherne was not a talkative man, unless he happened to be inspired to some such sudden outburst as that which marked the evening of Susie's arrival in Wapping; but quite suddenly it seemed to D'Eath's sensitive mind that there was a difference in his silence, while that side of the room was clear of smoke. He realised this, the whole sense of strangeness, before he actually glanced at his friend; then he caught his breath sharply. Treherne's pipe was out; his face bore exactly the same expression as Susie's, and it was at Susie that he was looking.

For a moment D'Eath seemed to draw his whole being in upon himself, as one does in any moment of sudden pain. That Treherne—— Oh, but it was out of the question, impossible; it would be too cruel, he told himself fiercely. Then he asked the girl to run up to his room and see if he had left his note-book in the pocket of his wet coat when he changed it for tea.

The doctor looked up as the girl rose, moved to the door; then his glance turned again towards the chair where she had been sitting. To D'Eath, with the memory of what he had heard only that evening, the expression upon the other man's face was almost beyond bearing, and he got up hurriedly, felt along the mantelshelf for the matches, dropping his pipe with a rattle into the grate.

"Oh, damn it all! Why can't you——" began Treherne, then rose hastily, and moving across to the window lifted one corner of the jealously drawn blind. "There's

no end of a storm blowing up—— Sorry, D'Eath, old man, I don't know what's coming to me, nice sort of nerves for a fellow with other people's lives in his hands. But the fact is I nearly jumped out of my skin when you dropped that pipe, must have been half asleep. Nothing broken, I hope?"

"No. No, nothing broken."

"Oh, well, that's one good thing, anyhow," remarked Treherne; then turned towards his writing-table and began collecting his papers, piling them, with shaking hands, into one indiscriminate heap.

Susie's next letter was the merest scrawl, little more than a line. Mark Fulton wrote that they had "got him" —a bit of shrapnel in one leg, nothing to worry about; "good luck" if only Susie would look at it in the right way, for ten to one it meant a run home, and he would see her again.

Despite all her rawness, Susie had plenty of intuition; something in the very lightness of the tone of that letter awed her. She said very little, kept on steadily with her work. She quite ceased to speak of her anxieties, to give herself the airs of one who knew; but they all realised that something was amiss, even O'Hagan, who took to bringing her strange gifts, polished her shoes until they shone like glass. As to Treherne, he watched her with a sad sort of mockery, altogether for himself, not at all for Susie.

"After all," he said, "it's the greatest time youth has ever known. It mayn't last long, but what single one of those young 'uns, marching forward with their fellows, swept high upon the tide of life, even knowing the end, would change places with us of another generation—policed back by Time, by every sort of tie, a conglomeration of tame duties?"

D'Eath saw little of his friend in these days, for it seemed that Treherne was for ever at work. "He'll kill himself if he goes on like this," said Lucelle Villiers, remonstrating to no purpose. Even when he was at

home he spent the greater part of his time busy in his surgery.

After a while Fulton was moved to a base hospital, and more definite news was received, from his colonel, from the doctor, and the sister who attended him. It was this latter who wrote, after a long break in those cheery pencilled notes to which Susie had become accustomed, saying that the amputation of the right leg had been found necessary, but that Mr. Fulton was going on well.

Even then there was no break in Susie's round of activities, but she was slower in her movements and speech: slower and more deliberate in all that she did. There was trouble on every side, and a good deal of illness, particularly among the children, while the excitement, the sense of elation which had come with those first two or three months of the war was over. It seemed that even in Wapping the people were at last growing up.

"I'll see them through the worst of the winter," said Treherne, "and then I think that I ought to be free to go. This darned war, it's upset all one's values—made one feel things in a way that I could have sworn was impossible—appallingly old, and yet dangerously young."

They saw more of Lucelle Villiers than they had once done. Sometimes D'Eath thought that it was merely Susie's presence which attracted the feminine element; then he found himself wondering if it could be that she cared for Treherne, half envying the other man. "She is like the moon," he thought one day, seeing her among a group of children waiting in the hall for some minor attention: aloof, and yet effulgent, carrying with her a sense of peace and order.

He took to watching her. She was much the same age as his daughter Mary—at least, so Susie had informed him, and yet at the same time how much younger and how much more mature. It was amusing to see her in the midst of one of those loud-voiced arguments so characteristic of the East End, when it seems certain that the very

next moment the disputants must be at each other's throats. She had a way of standing with her hands clasped in front of her, saying nothing, while every sort of passion wore itself to rags and tatters. For if ever any woman had a real gift for silence it was Lucelle Villiers.

Once when the O'Flanagans and Ryans raged most fiercely round her, during a famous battle in King's Head Alley, in which there was actual bloodshed, with broken bottles and copper sticks as weapons, D'Eath saw her—standing back upon a doorstep in her unruffled cotton dress and white apron—take out her watch and glance at it, then put one hand to her mouth and yawn.

It was not a pose, she was like that. Any sort of a scene bored her; the people knew this, and it affected them with a sort of childish shame. "But why all this fuss?" she would say, quite pleasantly, glancing round at the mottled, empurpled faces, and leave them without any answer.

It was close on Christmas, and Susie was still at the pier-end house. It seemed as though she had almost forgotten Dene Royal, had launched herself forward heart and soul towards the time when—and it might be any day now—Fulton should be brought back to England. One and all they held grimly to their work, though there was none of the old pleasure and satisfaction in it. There seemed so many more important things, bigger things, which they ought to be doing. "Rottin' 'ere, an' that there b——y scrap, goin' on all the while!" this was what O'Hagan said—what they all felt with a sense of staleness and bewilderment.

It was close on Christmas when Treherne came home one evening with a look of dismay, mingled with a certain grim amusement, upon his face.

"Look here, D'Eath, what do you think I've just heard? Awfully sad thing and all that—but, I say, man, this puts the lid on pretty well everything so far as you're concerned, doesn't it?—poor old Whitacre's dead, been dead a month or more. At least, it must be him, his people

seem to take it for granted; of course, there's no definite news, but the account tallies. An Englishman of about fifty, who arrived out there just as war broke out; the only one——"

"You forget"—Hugh D'Eath glanced up at him with whimsical, short-sighted eyes, stuttering a little—"you forget, th-th-there's me! It might have been—it—it—by Jove, for all anyone knows—it may *be* me!"

CHAPTER XXIX

To declare that the weakness of English country people lies in the limitation of their outlook is the merest platitude, but it is difficult to express platitudinous people in any other way.

If the D'Eaths and Colburns could have seen beyond the family nose they would have realised that more than one elderly gentleman might have arrived in Bad Nauheim upon the same day.

It was Kiddington's cousin who procured the news of the decease, gave it for what it was worth, and as—though his body was pretty constantly in the House of Lords—Kiddington's mind never budged from the Midlands, the conclusions he drew were bound to be local.

"One scarcely likes to say anything, you know, but there's not the very faintest doubt that it's poor old Hugh D'Eath; he was in a bad state of health when he went out, we knew that any sort of shock——" etc.

To do them all justice, Whitacre's name had been sedulously suppressed. There might have been some idea among the German authorities that by this means the other Englishman with the ominous name—so obviously a cipher—might be led to reveal himself. More than this, when further inquiries were set on foot through neutral channels Teutonic humour took the form of declaring "Herr Death is dead"; while there was a continuous poring of experts over those innocent letters, too innocent as it seemed, which had accumulated from Mary and the aunts, letters with the incriminating heading of "*Dene Royal*"—obviously Church and State—while added to these, and most incriminating of all, were D'Eath's own letters, letters which purported to

come from that adorable health resort, describing the prospect, the mountains, the salt works with their ozone evaporations, the Kurhaus, the Kurpark, the baths, the concerts, the fishing, the boating at Nauheim, all alike penned by a man who was obviously in London and not in Germany at all.

"Troubles never come singly," that was what Mary said—what she would say. Somehow or other Peggy had managed to edge her out of Dene Royal, and she was at Suttons, where Irene had been, very reluctantly, compelled to join her, for it was impossible to live as they were accustomed to live unless their incomes were united. To no single member of the family had there yet come the very faintest inkling of the truth that nothing could, ever again, be as it had been; that the whole world was cast into the melting-pot; that people like themselves—firm set for centuries—would, more than any other class, suffer from this change, this fluidity; that they would, one and all, be like Old Mother Trot with her petticoats "cut round about," scarcely knowing if they were themselves, most of all balked by the fact that their inferiors had—like the "little dog"—ceased to recognise them as persons of any special importance; realising—if they were acute enough to realise it—that they were as open to criticism as, say, their own servants, hitherto the most criticised of all peoples.

Mary went up to London for a night or so to stay with her aunts, and people were rude to her, they pushed and jostled. As Aunt Aggie said, "London is not what it used to be," and she was glad to be back; even at Suttons, cold and damp for the lack of sufficient fires.

She had gone up to town to buy mourning, because the aunts said that was what she ought to do. But she had not bought it. To wear mourning if her father were still alive seemed dreadful; not to wear it seemed equally dreadful, perhaps more so. Nothing was settled as it used to be settled, and Mary was very unhappy. For the time being that question of mourning obscured her entire horizon. She tried to compromise with grey and mauve, but there was no

real comfort in that, for she was one of those people who see everything in clear black or white.

Peggy had a succession of visitors at Dene Royal. It was always: "Poor darling" So-and-so "just for one night." She held tightly to every privilege with the hard tenacity of her kind: hunting, dancing at balls in aid of the Red Cross, getting up private theatricals, also in aid of the Red Cross; when there were no visitors at home she was up in London, selling programmes or helping at monster bazaars, with a fresh costume for every occasion. She did not ask George for money in these days, just bought what she fancied and trusted him to pay for it.

George had believed that any fool could manage a woman. "A firm hand, that's all they want," he had said, reflecting the Squire of Thorns with his "Keep 'em on the curb."

Old Roger Colburn did not manage his wife, though he thought he did; she went her own way like a sheep at a gap. He had unending disputes with the shopkeepers, whom he abused, cursed, and left; failing to realise that in a week their successors inevitably committed themselves beyond redemption, while Mrs. Colburn returned again to the tradesmen of her own choice. Certainly he was allowed to read the *Morning Post* unsullied by feminine fingers; but that was merely owing to the fact that his wife never looked at a paper unless she happened to be in need of a servant. "It only upsets me, so why should I?" that was what she said. She never shut a window when her husband opened it, at least so long as he was in the room, only shivered or asked for a shawl; upon which he would bang it to himself, reflecting with some pleasure on the fancifulness of women. These are small matters, but they typify an age when the weaker sex achieved its ends by wiles and tears, by "humouring a man."

Peggy D'Eath, however, was of another generation; she was bored with life and meant to show it; she was tired of her husband, and keeping clear of any definite rupture, she let him know it. To her mind he was wholly responsible for

that stupid deed of gift which had made life so much duller and more restricted than it need have been. "We can't go on throwing money about like this; you forget we have a position to keep up," George would say; sometimes he would even stoop to plead with her, and that was fatal.

"After all, what does your precious position count for?" she would ask. "Ten to one there'll be a revolution or something after the war, and then where shall we be? Much better spend all our money and get some fun out of it. I think the Sinclairs' plan is far more sensible than yours. Captain Sinclair puts every penny he doesn't actually want into pearls, and Nina has all the fun of them now; then if the worst does come they will fetch their price, anyhow in America."

"I don't know about that. Ten to one America will in the war before another year's out."

"What does that matter? It will take more than a European war to stop American women buying pearls, or anything else they want. American men don't get it all their own way, I can tell you that."

George found himself wondering if the English were really any more effectual in their own homes, with the blank despair of a man losing faith in the religion of his race. There was still no prospect of an heir, and by now Peggy was quite open about it: that was one good thing about the war, it provided a reason.

"To my mind, it would be absolutely criminal to have children at a time like this, with everything in such an uncertain state." That was what she said, piously; then again: "I can't see what we've got to save for; pretty well everything would be eaten up by the death dues, and, after all, we only have ourselves to think of."

When she spent a quarter's household allowance on a gold-mesh bag, set with sapphires, she declared that anyhow she had something to show for the money, which would not have been the case had it all gone on the butcher's and baker's bills, wages, household equipment.

Her obstinate refusal to realise that these things had to

be paid for, anyhow, gave her an air of childish stupidity. But she was by no means stupid. She knew her husband and his family; their punctilious sense of honour would never allow them to leave a debt unpaid, any more than George's pride would allow him to repudiate those which his wife ran up on her own personal account.

George himself was far from happy. Very slowly a dreadful doubt that he might prove to be, not exactly a failure, but inadequate to the times, was creeping in upon him. He had not been a success in his profession, but this he had put down to the jealousy of his colleagues, to the fact that he was not the sort of man to humiliate himself by kow-towing to foreigners. He had always felt that the position of a country gentleman was the one thing for which he was really suited; it was his ill fortune that he chanced to take up the reins at a time when every sort of value was changing.

He had read Oliver's "Ordeal by Battle," and the idea that a pilot who is perfectly capable of dealing with calms may be less capable of handling his ship in a tempest had impressed itself upon his mind. He forgot the rest of the book, but he remembered that because it took upon itself the likeness of a vague, personal reproach.

Was he inadequate? At the meetings held to settle the local Red Cross affairs, in aid of recruiting, of propaganda work, he would sometimes find himself speaking—hear his own voice going on and on in a flow of well-ordered words, impeccable sentiments—and realise that no one was listening to him, that nothing he said really hit home.

He had never been very much of a man: was too much like a sofa, very well stuffed, nice firm cushions, and no real springs. Tall, well-built, beautifully proportioned, inclined to a certain portliness, well-mannered, right-minded, he was still little more than the solidified echo of innumerable country squires who had too little to contend against.

There was, as yet, no rationing in England; it seemed inconceivable that there ever should be—but all

the same, George D'Eath must have been going short of something he needed—it might have been his own self-satisfaction—for he began to lose flesh; the tan buckskin waistcoat sagged a little. He did not stoop, but more than once Cherry remarked that he sat his horse less squarely than he had done.

"Good God, to look at the man and think that he's only thirty! He ought to be in the war, instead of pottering about here—he might be fifty to hear him talk!"

Cherry himself was well over fifty, but he had always been young, always would be. As for going to the war, George never even thought of it. He took his own position as a married man, his responsibility as a landowner, far too seriously.

The uncertainty as to his father's fate hung over him like a cloud. Sometimes he wished to goodness that he would come back and take up his old place; at other times he believed that if his death were once definitely established the tenants would be easier to manage, his wife more amenable to reason, realising his obligations.

It was a damp, drear winter. George, who did not hunt because he did not feel that it would be right, found himself continually interfering in matters which he had much better have left alone, simply because he felt it necessary to be for ever busy, to assert himself. For the first time in his life he was realising his own weakness, his limitations; the discovery was full of pathos, but without doubt it made him more difficult to get on with, fault-finding, querulous.

At last even Mary turned upon him, because she did not dare to turn upon Peggy, who could lash with scorpions; and that alone showed to what a pass things were come, for she had always been a little afraid of George, admired him immensely, patronised her "little sister-in-law."

"It was you who drove father away to his death. If it had not been for you—you and that horrid deed—

I don't believe he would ever have gone—at least, not at the last."

"My dear Mary, if I remember rightly, it was you yourself who arranged everything with that doctor chap, before the deed was as much as spoken of."

"I know; but that was before Peggy was taken ill, before I found I couldn't go with father."

"I fail to see what difference that made. Even you, my dear Mary, could scarcely have stemmed the tide of a world war." George spoke coldly, "nastily," and the tears came into Mary's shallow eyes.

"Well, it *did* make a difference, it began unsettling things. If it hadn't been for Peggy being taken ill, and all for nothing after all——"

"I should have thought that you would be the last person to reproach me on that score," answered George stiffly, but his face whitened. He could never forget that child who had known no successor—or rather what it stood for.

"I'm sure I don't want to hurt your feelings," said Mary, "and I dare say that it's quite natural that you and Peggy should want your own house to yourselves, though Peggy is always complaining about the servants. But things aren't in the least like what they used to be in dear father's time, and there's no use in pretending they are. There's poor Charles now——"

"I fail to see what there is 'poor' about Charles."

"Well, to come back to England on leave like that, after all he's been through, and never even seen his old home."

"He did not see his old home because he preferred to remain in London with his own friends, his own amusements. 'Poor Charles,' indeed! If you want to know why he stayed away, it was because he knew he couldn't get any more money out of me. And not only that"—George's smooth face flushed, he heard his own voice, as it might have been the voice of another man blaspheming; but still he held on, with a passion so unlike

him that it frightened Mary—"because the place bores him—as it bores us all, if the truth were known."

"Bores him? Bores us? Dene Royal! Our dear old home!" Mary was appalled as the meaning of her brother's words grew in upon her. Then the sense of family outrage gave way to one of personal grievance. "What would you say if you had to live at Suttons, with all the chimneys the wrong way for the wind?—with Irene and her impossible friends! Irene, who talks about sex and all sorts of dreadful things, before the servants too. Irene——"

"Your own sister!" It was George's turn to feel appalled. They had so prided themselves upon never having any rows, what were they coming to? He began again pompously: "Really, my dear Mary, if you can't manage to get on with your own sister——" and paused, as though her behaviour, the behaviour of women in general, was beyond all words.

Mary had risen to her feet, flushed as he was. Her heart—at the back of the grey silk blouse and well-tailored coat—beat tumultuously; quite suddenly she realised an awful pleasure in saying things which she knew ought, in common decency, to remain unsaid.

"Well, anyhow, I didn't choose my sister. You did choose Peggy, and—and you're no more happy with her than I am with Irene. We're none of us happy! That just shows! There is nothing settled, nothing comfortable like it used to be. I'm sure, when poor father was alive—if he was alive—if he is dead—if he knew how things were going on——" she ended incoherently in a burst of tears. Mary, the calm, the self-complacent! Mary, who had ruled Dene Royal and all who appertained to it with that mild justice which we might picture as distinguishing the Mother of the Gracchi; realising her duty, as she realised the duty of every cottager in Laishens, and exercising it in supreme and undisputed authority. Little wonder she lamented that nothing was as it had been—that she was "upset," "knocked up," "pulled down," or whatever she might have called it.

CHAPTER XXX

YOUNG Mrs. D'Eath was becoming increasingly reckless. From the date of George's first appeal to her better feelings she had begun to underrate him. She realised his pride, his sense of honour, and traded upon them; what she did not fully understand was the way in which vanity and self-esteem may come to take the place of nobler feelings.

As life grew duller she took to playing with fire, at first tentatively, then more daringly. She was so perfectly certain of herself that it gave her a false sense of security in dealing with other people.

There was, among the many visitors to Dene Royal, a certain second cousin of her own, a Captain French, with whom she had been through a sort of love affair shortly before her marriage.

She had never loved the man—had never loved anyone but herself, did not know what it meant. But it amused her to imagine that this had been the one real passion of her life, and that Teddy French—who cared as little for her as she did for him—never had, never could love any other woman.

Teddy's regiment was stationed on the West Coast. He was always just off to the front and coming to Dene Royal for a last good-bye; but so far he had not gone. Sometimes George felt that he was there hanging about Peggy a great deal too much, that it did not look well; but he was not jealous. It was almost pathetic to think how, in spite of everything, he still persisted in the belief that the wife he had chosen could do no real wrong, place anyone before him.

Then came a time when Teddy French received definite orders for the front. He came down for a few nights to Dene Royal, then went up to town to buy his field equipment. Upon this occasion he and Peggy showed their feel-

ings, or what they were pleased to call feelings, far more plainly than they had ever allowed themselves to do before—hanging wreaths round each other, decorating the poor pinchbeck image of a divine thing.

Captain French was expected back again—just for one night, to wish them all good-bye the last night before his embarkation—when a telegram arrived for Peggy saying that her mother was ill and she must go at once.

As it happened she had a slight cold and she magnified this, insisting upon it. Her experiments with private theatricals had endowed her with dramatic aspirations. She had set her heart upon a passionate farewell scene with her cousin, and not for worlds would she have relinquished it.

George declared that, cold or no cold, her duty was clear; she must go to her mother at once if she were ill. His own sense of family obligation was very strong, and, to do him justice, nothing save death would have prevented him from obeying such a summons.

But his wife was of an altogether different calibre. "And poor little me," she said, "I suppose no one cares what happens to poor little me. In weather like this—to go flying off, with this cold; it would be madness! Besides, what possible good could I do if I was ill when I got there, tell me that?"

George insisted, but to no effect. Peggy declared that her mother would be the very last person to wish her to sacrifice her own health, and in the end she had her own way. After all, he was as helpless with his wife as he had been with his employees over that right-of-way; he could no more take her by the scruff of her neck and lead her to her mother's sick-bed than he could haul them all one after another into prison.

As it happened, Teddy, really under orders this time, could not even stay the night. He appeared just after lunch the very next day, declaring that he was absolutely bound to leave before midnight, as they were off from Victoria at dawn.

It was difficult to say what George guessed. Perhaps he guessed nothing, was merely bent on paying Peggy out for her obstinate refusal to go to her mother; though he might equally well have been dense enough to believe that it was he whom Captain French had come to visit.

At any rate, he fetched the young man from the station himself—of course Peggy was not well enough to venture out—kept with them the whole of the afternoon; and then absolutely insisted, in a way that it was impossible to resist, upon sending his wife to bed at ten o'clock.

"She's not at all well, French. She was too ill to go to her mother, even when they wired—has no business to be up."

"Your things are all in the little blue dressing-room," young Mrs. D'Eath told her cousin languidly when she wished him good-bye. "You'll find them in the top drawer of the tall-boy," she gave him one significant look as they shook hands and trailed from the room.

Captain French had left certain articles of clothing at Dene Royal on the occasion of his last visit. He would go into the little blue room to fetch them, and there the farewell scene might take place—pale blue silk dressing-gown, boudoir cap and all; far more effective than a formal parting in the hall, with George's eye upon them both.

But George, perfect host as he was, most punctilious where he cared least for his guest, accompanied his wife's cousin in search of his belongings; then went on to her room to inquire if she knew where Collins kept the labels.

Hearing him coming, Peggy flung off her dressing-gown and hopped into bed. When her husband remarked that he had never before seen her wearing a cap in bed, she answered that he seemed to forget that she had a cold, glancing at him, as he fumbled over her writing-table drawers, with something very like real hatred. How tiresome he was, how dull, how slow!

By the time the labels had been found she was in such a state of rage and irritation that her usual caution and coolness were thrown to the winds. She had a feeling that it

would serve George right to show him what she really thought of him, to pay him out, to make him suffer; was in the sort of mood when, though she would have done nothing deliberately to commit herself—she did not care enough for French or anyone else for that—she would yet take risks, almost welcome "something happening."

Directly her husband left the room she ran out on to the landing, not even waiting for her dressing-gown. All the rules of the house were as fixed as those of the Medes and Persians; unless there was a party the servants were in their own rooms at half-past ten. She had heard it strike eleven some minutes before, then heard the motor drive up to the door; in another moment Teddy would be gone, and that great scene left unacted. She would not have cared if all the servants had seen her; at least that was what she thought. "This is what love means!" she said to herself, with a sense of triumph; though, in reality, her mood, outcome of the anger and obstinacy of a normally cold-blooded woman, was far removed from anything of the sort. "George! Who cares about George?" she muttered to herself as she crept to the rail of the landing. If only he could have heard it! If only she could have hurt him without making herself uncomfortable!

Teddy was there, with his coat already on, and that stupid George in his civilian evening dress bending, fussing over the luggage, tying on labels.

"Anyone else would stick 'em on!" she thought furiously. "They'll only come off—all Teddy's things be lost!"

Captain French glanced up, and she actually leant over the balustrade, waved; while he showed his white teeth in an amused grin. It did not matter what happened; he was going away, ten to one he would never return; and George was such a stick, deserved anything he got.

"Dear me! I'm one short now," said George, and turned into the study in search of another label.

A moment more and Peggy was round the corner of the landing and down the stairs—in her nightgown, just

as she was. Perhaps it was the one purely natural moment of her life, but even then she had been able to calculate—"It'll take that old slowcoach at least three minutes to write another label." She saw French, but she knew just how George looked—pictured him vindictively, his elbows squared over the writing-table as he had been taught to hold them at school.

She was three steps from the bottom of the stairs when Captain French caught her in his arms, held her, kissed her, every drop of his blood aflame with the touch of her soft body beneath the flimsy nightgown, the one glance he had caught of her bare feet and flushed face.

Even then she was calculating. The young man knew nothing of love, but he had passion, and she had neither one nor the other. There was still plenty of time; they had not been half a minute. Still, it was as well to be on the safe side, and she was drawing herself apart from her lover, with a stifled laugh, when the unexpected happened—as it always does happen—and George reappeared at the study door.

"I was sure I had written another; it was on the floor. I——" His eyes swept the hall in search of his guest, travelled to the foot of the stairs; even before the last broken words slid, almost mechanically, from his lips, before Peggy—wrenching herself free—was at the first turn of the banisters, he realised the full significance of what he saw; realised, or thought he realised, even more than he saw. For with him, as with Mary, white was white, black was black, a woman was decent or she was not decent; to throw yourself into a man's arms in your nightgown was not the act of a decent woman but an adulteress.

It was of no use whatever for Peggy to plead the rights of cousinship. "If you can get twelve sane men to go into a box and swear that it is impossible there should be any impropriety—criminal relationship—between two people who are cousins, I might believe you," he said, with some reason.

Peggy had felt sure that whatever might happen she

was safe, that George's family pride would have prevented anything in the way of an open scandal. And so it might have done if there had been children. But there were no children—here again the astute young woman had overreached herself—and after all, cold or no cold, and anyone might have been expected to take cold, half naked in a man's arms, she was forced into that reluctant visit to her mother.

CHAPTER XXXI

It might have been said of George D'Eath about this time, as Susie had said of her father, he was "disintegrated"; everything which he had counted out of his own life, regarded as possible only to those sort of men who always do manage to get mixed up with shady people, had come upon him; it was like a landslip by reason of which the greater part of a mountain may become—almost in a breath—the mere rubbish heap of a plain.

A morbid melancholy overcame him; he could not bear to meet people, to be spoken to. Haggard, sullen, suspicious, he went about the estate like a ghost of his former self. "He must have had more in him than one ever thought; really cared for that silly little wife of his," that was what people said. But this was wide of the mark. George D'Eath had cared immensely for himself, and it now seemed as though he were cut away from everything which had once bulwarked him up in his self-esteem. He had failed as a landlord, as a patron, as a country gentleman, as the father of a family, as a husband, even as a relation. Or, rather, the rank ingratitude, the depravity, the crass ignorance of people who did not know what was good for them had proved too much for him.

He might have languished, have actually died of what the old novelists would have described as "mortification," had not some spark of real human malice, jealousy, hatred awakened in him. Peggy had been a young person of no very special family, and he had stooped a trifle in marrying her, so certain of her gratitude, the respectability of those people who were only just emerging from the middle classes.

Thus he felt himself doubly deceived, and, declaring that

one must meet "people of that sort" upon their own ground, instigated proceedings for a divorce.

The whole family was against him, arguing that it was much better to say nothing of what had occurred, allow Peggy to stay on in the house as its nominal mistress—"With someone at hand to see that she behaves herself," this from Aunt Caroline, who found the servant question increasingly difficult in London. Even a separation was better than a divorce, though that was bad enough; it was dreadful to think how people would talk.

They were all alike antagonistic to George; just as we are apt to be antagonistic towards those who bring an infectious disease into the house; no matter how blameless they might be, how much they suffer, they have no right to make everyone else uncomfortable. Here, indeed, was another case in which it was of no use to be sorry.

But for once George did not care what people said; even felt that he would be savagely glad to give them something to talk about; was quite ready to scandalise, to hit out. Apart from all this—his jealousy, his bitterness, his amazed sense of outrage—was that desire for the perpetuation of his race; and to do him justice it was not only of himself or of Dene Royal that he thought. It seemed that the old order of things was tumbling to pieces around them; that the tiny fingers of yet another D'Eath might be able to guide, not only that particular family coach, but all family coaches threatened with disaster—the ditch of democracy, the swamp of socialism. The heirs to so many titles and estates were being killed, almost every day. "If we, and what we stand for, are wiped out, what will become of the country?" that was what George was continually asking himself, with a sense of horror.

It was all very well for the aunts to talk; not for them, not for anyone in the world, was he going to tie himself down to—for all intents and purposes—a life of sterility.

The divorce would cost money. The mere fact of Cap-

tain French being at the front, "fighting for his country," was against the injured husband; there was practically no witness as to Peggy's supposed infidelities. But George had always been as obstinate as a mule. Whatever happened he would go on; if it broke him he would go on, carry the thing through.

It was just like Fate—George's own special Fate, which from a sort of obliging, universal shopkeeper had taken to itself the likeness of an avid fury—that just at this juncture Cleaver, Brown & Son should have intimated that they would like to see him on some very urgent business; that, unless he could make it convenient to come to London, young Mr. Brown would wait upon him at Dene Royal.

George did not care to make it convenient to go to town. "If he wants to see me let him come down here and see me." That was what he said, bolstering himself up with something of his old self-importance; though the change in him was shown by the secret shrinking he had from this man's visit, from anyone's visit, from the very sound of the front-door bell; the certainty that, whatever brought young Brown to Dene Royal, it was sure to be something disagreeable.

He was right there, and young Brown found the visit fully as disagreeable as he did; for it involved a confession of something very like negligence on the part of the youngest member of the firm.

The report of Mr. D'Eath's death in Nauheim had come to their ears. They very sincerely hoped that it were not true; at any rate, it would be some time before the death could be legally proved, perhaps not until the end of the war.

There must be a great many delicate, middle-aged gentlemen in Nauheim, and there seemed no particular reason to suppose that their late client—their client, he begged Mr. D'Eath's pardon—was the person spoken of. But still, the suggestion of the possibility of such a thing, combined with their knowledge of the distressing state of the elder Mr. D'Eath's health, had naturally led them to consider his affairs afresh, revise the question of that deed of gift. And unfortunately, very unfortunately—here young Mr. Brown's

smooth-shaven gills became more deeply suffused with colour; he did not hesitate, but at the same time he chose his words with, if anything, a more deliberate care—the law was very involved, very inadequate to the real needs of such cases. If he had been able to go into that deed of gift more closely, given more time to it—— .

"You came down here on three separate occasions in connection with the affair." George spoke coolly, but it did not displease him to realise that young Brown was in difficulties; there was some consolation in the thought that other people, really efficient people, might suffer as he had suffered.

"Oh, three occasions!" Young Brown stiffened, on the defensive at once, inferring that thirty would not have been out of the way. "Perhaps you do not realise the intricacy, the complications of the law; how impossible it is to guard against, to foresee, every contingency which may arise. But be that as it may, Mr. D'Eath, we considered that the correct, the open thing for us to do was that I should come down here as the—well, the representative of our firm, and acquaint you with the fact that further investigation has led us to a certain discovery in connection with that deed to which your father put his signature."

"You mean it's not legal?"

George D'Eath was standing in front of the fire staring at the lawyer; he spoke rudely, in a way that he would never have allowed himself to speak, even to a dog, in the days that were past. He was less immaculately groomed; all his bland self-sufficiency had disappeared; there was something about him haggard, savage, and yet almost childishly resentful, which could not but strike young Brown, who—thinking how his client had gone to pieces—was touched to a half-contemptuous pity.

He himself was drilling as one of the City Volunteers, had caught up some of the martial coarseness of the day. "No guts to him! A young man younger than I am—but the whole race is effete, worn out," he thought, relieved

to find that George imagined the truth to be so much worse than it was.

"Illegal! Oh, no, by no means illegal," he hastened to say. "It's not likely that we should make any mistake of that sort, Mr. D'Eath, though I own we're human, like other people. No, no, this is quite a minor matter. But as I was afraid that perhaps I had not made it quite clear upon the last occasion when I had the pleasure of meeting you, I thought that—— Well, the fact is, and doubtless you are already acquainted with it—that if the donor, in a deed of this kind, dies within three years from the date of drawing up the deed by which he hands over his estates to his heir, or heirs, the recipient is liable to the same death dues as he would have been called upon to pay had the property descended to him in the usual way. At any other time this would not be so serious. But I need not tell you that just now, with taxation advancing by leaps and bounds, what I can but call the bare-faced mulcting of the landed proprietors, the moneyed classes, it assumes a more serious aspect."

"You mean that if my father has died in Nauheim, all the death dues on what he was pleased to bestow as a free gift upon his family and dependants can be claimed as under any ordinary will?"

"Precisely."

"And yet you did not mention the law on this point when you drew up that deed—what we might call 'the three-year clause'? What did you mean by that, I'd like to know, eh?" George spoke loudly, hectoringly; he wanted to hurt young Brown, as he had wanted to hurt everyone with whom he had been driven into contact during the last few weeks. "You mean to tell me that you had the audacity to come down here, at my expense—at my expense, mind you—not once, but repeatedly, and draw up a deed of gift—for which, no doubt, I shall have to pay through the nose—when all the while you knew so little of your business as to run me into a difficulty of this sort?"

"Mr. D'Eath, really, I don't think——" Young Brown broke off tremblingly, almost pale; never in his life had he been spoken to like this.

"No, you don't think, you never have thought, you never do think, don't know how to think. That's what I am complaining of. But *I* think, think to some purpose, that you're an incompetent muddler, sir, that you know nothing of your business; that if the English law, with which you are pleased to find such fault, was of any use it would see you in prison for making false pretences, for being—though unfortunately there seems to be no law against that—the damnedest ass that it was ever my misfortune to come across."

George bellowed out the words as the Squire of Thorns might have bellowed them; he would "show them," every one of them; he would let them know what he thought of them.

He rode that afternoon; furiously fast, far over the hills; spurring on his horse as he would like to have spurred everyone else with whom he came in contact, rowelling it until the foam on its sides was stained with blood.

Riding home almost in the dark, at foot's pace, done to the world, he heard two men talking in the stackyard of the Home Farm, and reined up his horse, stepping silently in the deep litter—suspicious, sure that they were talking about him, as in these days he always was sure that everyone was talking about him, his affairs. And for once he was right; during a moment or so one rustic voice droned on unintelligibly; then came Davies's clearer, better-educated tones.

"Well, it's a pity he don't join the Army like Mr. Charles. What does a young man like 'im want to do stavangering about here in these days; 'tain't even as though 'e 'ad a son ter keep the place warm for."

"Pokin' 'is nose in where 'e 'ain't no manner o' right ter be." By now George was more accustomed to the sound, borne upon the keen air with its suspicion of frost.

"A danged fool—a fool in 'is folly, like a bull at a gaete." It was old Sam Oxley who spoke, cleared his throat, spat. "An' that ain't not all, neether. What 'a' 'e bin an' gorn an' done with t' owd Squire, tell me that?"

Back in his own study; without even waiting to change his damp clothes, his mud-splashed boots, George sat down at the writing-table and addressed a letter to Cherry. Davies was to be dismissed; he gave no reason; it pleased him to give none, would hurt more like that. The new blacksmith who was coming to Laishens, and whose accommodation had been a question of some difficulty, was to be given the house now occupied by Sam Oxley, who was useless save to make mischief.

This letter dispatched by hand, he drew his chair up to the fire and sat gazing into it, his boots stretched out to the blaze.

For a long while he sat thus, his embittered face set; then he began to nod, tired out with his ride, the conflict of resentful thoughts which possessed him.

He woke suddenly with a start and sat bolt upright. The house was absolutely still, so still that the silence came upon him with the force of something definite, charged with meaning—the actual, half-mocking expression of his denuded life.

The bailiff's words returned to him. After all, why should he not go to the war? What would it matter if he were killed, if Charles and Harold followed suit, if the whole race were wiped out? Nothing—less than nothing.

The thought was fleeting, mocking, but all the same it marked a state of mind which those who knew him, which he himself—above all, he himself—would, a few weeks earlier, have regarded as fantastically impossible. That he should not matter, that people like him should not matter! Incredible, contemptible as the idea might be, it was yet fated to take actual shape among the many other incredible events of an incredibly changed world.

CHAPTER XXXII

D'Eath was coming out of the General Steam Navigation yard at Irongate. It was a bitterly cold afternoon, damp and raw from a sunless, brooding day, which had threatened rain and then lost energy, even for that. He had been asked to see if he could get any tidings of a man who had sailed on one of the company's vessels, and must now go and tell the wife—who had turned to him for help, with that mazed helplessness, that lack of initiative so characteristic of the grossly ignorant—that there was still no news. The steamer was not yet posted as lost, but she had been long missing. "I'm sure there's no one wants to know how things stand more than we do," said the junior member of the firm, whom he had interviewed. "No satisfaction anywhere; no insurance, no anything. The relations of the men feel like that too. I can tell you there's far more bother, more dead loss and disagreeableness, in cases of this sort than when a ship's lost outright. Of course we'll let all the relations of the crew know directly we have any news. But until then there's nothing to be done."

"Nothing to be done." The world of Wapping seemed to have settled down to that—with the gathering dusk, which showed no warmth of sunset, as a symbol of the trouble which had overtaken Mrs. Degan and so many others; the long-drawn-out uncertainty and misery, the privations which in such a case come to a family always just hanging on to the necessities of life, a woman who is not quite definitely established as a widow, children who may or may not be orphans. The tragedy dragged—with no excuse for one real, satisfying orgy of grief and mourning, no funeral, no neighbourly consolation and help

—until it became more of a nuisance than a tragedy, ending as tamely as this sunless day. It was just as though the same dirty dish-cloth had wiped out what there was of the drab light along with the drab life of yet another unconsidered man.

"I'd be thankful for any news, even if it was the worst as cud be," that was what one wife had said. "There would be some sorter a pension, insurance money. Now there ain't nuffin', and I dussen't even move inter a smaller room, as I oughter do by rights, a-cause o' the charnce o' 'im turnin' up agin. Oh, yes, 'e was a good enuff man ter me and the children—but what can yer do when yer don't know where yer are? Nuffin' settled——"

The phrase caught D'Eath like the flick of a whip—"Nuffin' settled!" "Everything settled"—Dene Royal and Wapping! Was the whole world alike in its desire for a well-defined routine, whatever the cost?

"I don't believe anyone really cares much about anyone else," he thought dejectedly, then remembered Susie and her glowing romance. But Susie was young—Mrs. Degan might have loved her man like that when she was young. Treherne pretended to think that it was a matter of blood pressure and gastric juices more than anything else—sneered while he suffered. Who was it designated love as "a glamour cast by nature for the perpetuation of the species"? Well, there was something in that. He thought of George and Peggy and their child. George did not really care for anyone but himself; wished to see himself repeated, reiterated by a stable civilisation which kept people in their rightful places.

As he turned into St. Katharine's Way someone touched him on the sleeve. "Just the very identical cove as I was after. 'Ere's a laedy as was goin' ter your plaece after the doctor." It was 'Rene, flushed, round-faced as ever, and yet with that look which she had worn since Alf's death, as of a child who has been slapped and doesn't know why.

"She loved him," he thought, even at this moment;

then again, "No, she didn't; not until he seemed to be happy with another woman, she had left him." He turned "Who——" he began; then—with a feeling as though he were slowly drawing remembrance to him out of another world—realised that the person whom 'Rene escorted was Mrs. Ian Paulton.

She was wrapped in a long fur coat, but instead of a hat wore a dark grey veil with a narrow white border across the forehead; her head drooped, her eyes were raised. It was with difficulty that Hugh D'Eath prevented himself from smiling in her face; to be brought back from the depths—for this!

"She was in the Minories, lookin' fur all the world like an old 'en as 'as laid an egg and cudn't not remember where. I 'eard 'er askin' a beak the way ter Wappin' Old Stairs, an' somefing about the doctor, an' seein' as 'ow I was comin' along 'ere meself, I was willin' ter oblige. I was just a-tellin' 'er about you—well, just this very minute when we ran inter yer, so ter speak."

"You don't remember me?" Mrs. Paulton sighed, then smiled wistfully, as though she were still trying to bear with the world as it was.

"Oh, yes, of course I remember you," said D'Eath, stuttering a little between amusement and bewilderment; "only I can't understand——"

"She's on some sorter lay fur fittin' out all the kids in the East End wiv cradles or such like," explained Mrs. Phillips. She spoke politely, as though she felt it incumbent upon her to do the honours; but there was something in the lift of her chin which showed antagonism, dislike. "I tells 'er as 'ow I don't know what it's like up West; but 'ereabout the kids like ter be cuddled warm along o' their mammies!"

"You were coming to see Doctor Treherne?"

"Yes, we—some other ladies and myself—dear, devoted things—are dividing up the slums between us."

"As though it wur caeke!" muttered 'Rene.

"We have a list with the names of all the medical men and clergymen. I chose Wapping because it's so—you know, Dickens, and all that—so romantic. One must do something in this terrible war, don't you see?" She paused, sighed, pulling her furs more closely around her. "I dare say you've seen our photos in the papers—'The Rescuers of the Race,' that's what they call us. And really it does seem to me, to all of us, that the young life of the country is so frightfully important. This young woman, now, married—not that it matters whether they are married or not, all that must be swept aside, we simply can't *afford* to let it matter—a fine young woman, so strong and healthy! And yet she tells me she has no children. You did, didn't you, tell me that you hadn't any children?" Her vague, indifferent glance rested for a moment upon 'Rene.

"Talkin'!" cried Mrs. Phillips. "An' 'ow many 'ave you, I'd like ter know? Question for question, fair play's a jewel!"

Mrs. Paulton's pale cheek flushed a trifle, while her gaze became even more definitely detached.

"Now, *we* hold that it's the duty of every woman in these days, not so much to have a child as to see that it is reared under the best, the most hygienic——".

"Yappin'!" broke in 'Rene again. "You as ain't got one o' your own, couldn't 'ave, not if yer wanted to! 'Cause why, it taekes two ter that job, an' no man as was a man——"

"'Rene!" cried D'Eath, in a sudden panic.

"Garn! 'Er ter be talkin'! 'Er! More like a strip o' tripe nor anyfing I ever seed in the way o' a female. 'Er an' 'er b——y banana stunt—'er gettin' in the paepers; 'er what they gives yer fur yer money!"

"'Rene!"

"Orl right, ole dear, don't yer worry!" 'Rene smiled at him broadly, her eyes full of angry tears; then swung round, put out her tongue in the direction of Mrs. Paulton's shoulder, and moved off, muttering.

"It's very cold, don't you think?" remarked that lady. "And if we could find somewhere to sit down——"

D'Eath had a sort of idea that she was trembling beneath the flower-seller's scorn; but she turned it off with a little laugh. "They are so dear, so original, such a study, these slum people of yours."

"We're not more than five minutes from the house, if you can manage that? We can give you some tea, and perhaps Doctor Treherne will be in, or perhaps I can help you."

"You're living down here, with him? How funny!" For the moment her gaze swept him, and he was thankful to observe its vagueness.

"You have given up making your birds'-nests?"

"Oh, dear, no! That's what is really so sweet about it all—everything in life, even this war, all fitting into a beautiful sort of—what do you call it?—mosaic. That's one of the ideas that's been growing on me—from birds'-nests to babies'-nests. I say it over to myself —'From birds'-nests to babies'-nests'—quite wonderful, isn't it? For, you know, that is what we are mostly concerned with, our 'stunt': cradles out of banana crates—so perfectly sweet, you know, with white spotted muslin and ribbons: pale pink for boys, pale blue for girls."

"But here, in the East End——" A sudden vivid picture of the Phillips's room as he had seen it the night the child died—the poor discoloured bedclothes, the garments hung over the end of the bed because there was nowhere else to hang them, the tiny mound in the middle of it, the wooden horse tethered to the foot—flashed across D'Eath's mind.

He and Mrs. Paulton were moving on side by side amid the crowd of lorries, the men in their leather aprons. For all her appearance of languor, her steps were longer, quicker than his own; more than once her arm or thigh brushed his side and he felt how firmly, how massively she was

built. If ever there was a woman who ought to have had children it was she.

"I hope your husband is quite well?" The question was in part the outcome of his thought; in part the acquired habit of that politeness which among the lower classes demands a series of minute inquiries as to the welfare of an entire family.

"Very well, I—Oh, but I suppose you mean Mr. Paulton; he's somewhere in France, I believe—really, I'm not quite sure. We parted, you know, just after war broke out. It was starvation, the worst sort of starvation—soul starvation—to live with such a man. And so Willy and I—you remember I told you about Willy Pyke and how perfectly sweet he was helping me with all the odds and ends for my precious birds'-nests—so intelligent and nice about a house!—threw in our lots together. Paulton-Pyke I call myself now. It didn't seem kind to quite cut out poor Ian, and you know it does so help people to remember. Perhaps you will come and see us, if you can bear the thought of penetrating into our wilderness—a dreadful district, so terribly bourgeois, so out of the way. I often say to Willy, I wonder what I ever did that I should be doomed to live in West Kensington!

"Alfred Carruthers—you know Alfred? Oh, of course, everyone does, such a clever, witty creature!—said to me only the other day: 'Adultery, my dear, that's nothing; but to live in West Kensington's enough to damn anyone.' Charming, wasn't it? Not so very far from Chelsea, and yet how different! But really one's friends are marvellous, and of course they all realise that we're not in the least like all the other people living there, so *dreadfully* stodgy and proper! But a terrible old aunt of Willy's left him the house, and so we have to put up with it—the war and all, you know. Is this where you live? A-h-h! now I do call this perfectly sweet! After the divorce—we couldn't go on living in West Kensington after we were married, two dreadful stodgy things at the same

time—matrimony and West Kensington—too depressing, don't you know—we really might come here, set the fashion."

Susie and Miss Villiers—who had taken to joining the party at tea—were in the big room at the pier-end house waiting for him, but to D'Eath's relief Mrs. Paulton-Pyke scarcely seemed to see them. "Your daughter? Oh, but how perfectly lovely to have a daughter!" she said as she was introduced. Then her glance ran past the girl to the room. "What a perfectly fascinating room!—It's not only the women and their babies, and the doctors and clergymen and people like that, we want to get hold of, you know, but the banana merchants who have the crates, don't you see? That was my idea—'First let's get hold of the banana merchants,' I said. And naturally, of course, down at the docks and all. 'You are so wonderfully practical, dear,' that's what they all say, not the banana people, but the other members of our crusade——"

It seemed as though Mrs. Paulton had lost her trick of silence with the necessity of asserting her modernity, independence; possibly exchanging it for the "Pyke." But her words still came disjointedly, with an air of weariness; one could almost see her fingering over her ideas, sorting them out, one by one, like any other woman tidying her drawers. There were still long spaces of silence, and yet she was so engrossed in her own affairs that, with her habit of brushing aside, breaking into what anyone else happened to be saying, she gave the impression of never ceasing to talk.

By the time that D'Eath saw her off at Wapping station he felt as though he had been wrung out, left twisted. From banana crates, babies, birds'-nests, she had slithered on, regardless of Susie, into an involved discussion of the ethics of married life, of her own life in particular. From thence she glanced off for a moment to Lady Hester Fielden. "You know she lost her husband. Darling Hester! She's put up the loveliest window to him in some church or other. I don't remember where it is,

but I shall know when I get home, because the card's over my mantel-piece—her wedding, you know, next week in the same church, and to such a charming fellow, a Captain Inglis, a fellow-officer of poor little Fielden's, and a great friend."

CHAPTER XXXIII

Early in February Mark Fulton was sent home, taken to a hospital near Southampton.

Susie received the news at breakfast and passed it on to the others. Her face was flushed, her blue eyes deep and glowing; but her whole expression was grave, almost solemn, as she returned to the perusal of her letter. Breakfast over she crossed to the window, and sitting down by it, with her hands folded in her lap, stared out, biting her lips, frowning a little. Treherne, in a hurry as usual, had left the room before the other two stirred; but D'Eath hesitated for a while, asked for another cup of coffee, pottered over his paper, waiting for the girl to speak, fully expecting that she would be eager over some arrangement for going down to Southampton to see her lover. But she said nothing; and after a while, forbearing any questions, he also left the room and made his way to the little office, where he went over the accounts of the clinic each Saturday morning. Passing through the dispensary he found Lucelle Villiers busy with some simple mixture.

"Susie's young man is back in England—in hospital at Southampton," he said, half ashamed of the lilt in his voice, the sensation of flushed excitement. Miss Villiers was standing close against the high, narrow window, a measuring glass in one hand, a bottle raised high in the other. Her silhouette was outlined with a narrow pencilled line of gold against the chill winter sunshine, and for the first time D'Eath realised that her dark hair had threads of red in it, that the soft down at the nape of her neck and edging her cheek was more gold than brown. "She always seemed like a dark woman," he thought, "and she's really not dark at all; it's only her eyes, the paleness of her skin, which gives her that effect." Her raised hands, particularly the

one which held the bottle, were extraordinarily white, almost transparent; it seemed incredible that they should be so strong, so firm, as he well knew them to be. She was wearing a white overall which covered her from the hem of her dress right up to her chin, buttoning tight round her throat; every line of her tall form was long and clean and clearly defined.

"Good God!" thought D'Eath; "what in the world is Treherne thinking about not to fall in love with her, persuade her to marry him? Is he made of stone?"

Even as the thought came to him he realised afresh, knew for certain, that Treherne cared for Susie, and it angered him. That chit! Darling as she was, it seemed preposterous that two men should be willing to devote their lives to her, while this—he checked the thought and harked back. Treherne and Susie! Why, even if Fulton had never appeared upon the scene it would still be the same thing. Treherne was at least twenty-five years the elder. Folly even to think of such a thing! In his anger, which was merely the outcome of a deep concern for his friend, Hugh D'Eath—wondering how he could be such a fool, a grown-up man, to allow himself to be vitally hurt by a mere child—quite lost sight of the fact that Treherne had never said a single word regarding what he felt, suffered.

Meanwhile, Lucelle Villiers was counting out the drops which she let fall from the bottle into the beaked glass. At last she lowered her hands and glanced at him with her pleasant, impartial air, that look which left D'Eath uncertain as to whether it held contempt or tenderness.

"Back, is he? That's very nice for Susie."

"Nice! Nice! How lukewarm you all are! One would think it would be something more than—'nice'! To know her one might have imagined her full of plans, halfway to Southampton already, wild with excitement. But there she is sitting by the window looking out—frowning."

"Oh," murmured Lucelle, smiling a little as she moved over to a rack and took out another bottle.

"Oh—oh——" repeated D'Eath, almost rudely, mocking

her. "You women! Perhaps she doesn't care, after all, perhaps she's changed her mind." He spoke with a sort of reckless scorn, but all the same the very idea of such a thing hurt him almost beyond bearing. That Susie should be like that, too—Susie, whom he had been so sure of!

"Oh, she cares right enough." Miss Villiers began to shake the bottle she held in her hand, filled with a reddish liquid, glowing like a ruby against the light. The window cut across an angle of the river wall, and a sudden, more decided ray of sunshine streaming down, catching itself back from the glossy surface of the water, shone against the other bottles in the rack—blue and bright green and white. Miss Villiers shook mechanically, frowning a little, gazing up at the thick sediment at the bottom of her particular bottle, with a faint reflection of colour in a clear wash across her face. "She cares—all right—cares so much—perhaps she's—frightened." The words were punctuated by the motions of her hand.

"Frightened! Frightened of what, of him—of young Fulton?"

"Oh, no."

"Of what, then—of herself?"

"Not altogether—a little; but not altogether—mostly of life. A few weeks ago she would not have been like this; she would have—have——" Lucelle's hands had ceased to move, but she still hesitated—then used the word "gormandise"—"would have gormandised it—gobbled it all up."

"I don't know," said D'Eath. "He's here in England, after being through all sorts of terrible experiences. Why, she herself used to say that we did not half realise what it all meant."

"But that was before she was really anxious about him; since then she's felt more and said much less. Now—well, happiness on the top of such pain and fear *is* frightening, you know. If she frowned it was probably to keep back her tears. Susie has a horror of tears."

"Well, still I don't understand," said D'Eath, almost

pettishly. "I know if I were young, in love with anyone——"

"But you're not. You're only in love with love; that makes all the difference!"

Lucelle spoke quite calmly, as though stating some fact connected with the mixture which she was compounding; replaced the crimson bottle on the rack, and, taking down another, she bent forward, peering, in her short-sighted way, at a slip of paper which lay upon the table.

D'Eath laughed, half nervously. Of a sudden he was acutely conscious of the silence of the room, the steady throb of an engine at the farther side of the river, the rattle of glasses in the little public-house, "The Town of Ramsgate"—so close to the pier end house that it would have been possible to shake hands across The Stairs. The bargees had just been in for their first morning freshener, and the barman was whistling "My Little Grey Home in the West" as he washed up the glasses.

"I—love! Oh! but that's wide of the mark, sheer nonsense at my age."

"I don't imagine it's the sort of thing which has much to do with age."

"Well, but now! It's Susie——" stammered D'Eath, flushing.

"Still, after all, you must acknowledge, one's judgment, upon anything so intangible as feeling, is largely influenced by one's own experience. If you thought, felt nothing, you would expect nothing from Susie, excepting that she should not make a nuisance of herself. That's the common attitude of unimaginative people towards lovers. On the other hand, if you were in love, as she is in love now, you would probably behave just as she is behaving, anyhow, understand it. Still"—she smiled upon him with frank amusement—"it may come, even yet."

"I can't make out what you mean." D'Eath was irritated, half pleased, as we are when we find ourselves the subject of discussion, in all save family conclaves. He was looking years younger than when he first came to Wapping;

there was something almost fantastic in any signs of age which he did betray—the fine sparkling greyness of his hair, the lines of his face, darting upwards at odd angles. For once Lucelle Villiers's eyes rested full upon him, with malice and tenderness, as he stood leaning against the side of the window; then she laughed again.

"Mean? Oh, well, when—if ever—you are completely grown up." Her rather dim, dark eyes wrinkled with amusement. "Was there ever anything less like a middle-aged man?" she thought, "more like a sort of faun, left out over night, just touched by the frost."

"Well, anyhow, if I were in love—of course the idea's preposterous"—he spoke almost angrily, it was ridiculous that he should be driven into such a simile—"but still, if I were, and the person I loved best in the world had come home out of—out of—all that, I wouldn't just *sit.*"

"Oh, yes, you would," said Miss Villiers, her languid voice charged with sudden, intense feeling—"or, stand rather—with your shoes off. There are Holies of Holies, you know. Oh, but that's just it, you don't know."

"I think you forget," D'Eath spoke rather stiffly, "that I have been married, that I have children."

"That makes no difference; that taught you nothing; at least, I'm sure it taught you nothing. At Susie's age, before your feelings were blurred, you would have realised why she wants to sit still, be left alone, keep away—anyhow, for a little while. We can all face trouble more or less decently, but, if we are worth our salt, great happiness terrifies us—terrifies! Oh, I know——" She broke off, laughing, almost as though she were a little ashamed of her own emotion, turned again to her bottles and glasses. "Ah, well, we need not worry about them, they're young, they're happy. It comes to this: they wouldn't change with us old ones, for all our safety," she added, using almost identically the same words as Treherne.

"Oh, *you!*" cried D'Eath, moving away from the window. "Well, I suppose I must go and do some work."

"And the first children already in the waiting-room."

She raised one finger. There indeed was the shuffling of ill-shod feet, the clang of iron heels. "What have I been thinking of?"

"But of course *you*—with you it's ridiculous to talk of age—safety! You and Susie. Why, you're the two children of the establishment."

She glanced up at him gravely—"I am thirty-five," she said.

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense! That's ridiculous! Why, I always looked on you——" He broke off and moved from the room without another word, his whole being possessed by the sudden thought—"Well, anyhow, there's not as much difference between this girl and me as there is between poor old Treherne and Susie." For the moment he felt as though he were treading on air: then, like a door slammed in his face, came the thought of Mary—oh, yes, Mary was well over thirty—his own daughter! Treherne might be a very great deal older than Susie, but Treherne was in the prime of life, there was no doubt about that; while—well, he was nothing more or less than an old buffer. Lady Hester had shown him that much plainly enough.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT is strange how the same qualities will appear in the apparently most diverse members of one family. No two people could have well been more unlike than George and Susie D'Eath. But they had this in common: both had believed themselves to be immune from defeat once their minds were made up. It was to Susie's advantage that she discovered her vulnerability early in life: it came harder to George, for it came later. All the same when it did come it was in a form regarding which there could be no mistake. If his desire had been intangible for anything so indefinite as, say, success, he might have half believed in the realisation of his aims: the idea of what success meant might have become blurred. For with many aspirations there is truth in the old adage that "everything comes to those who wait, or else they wait so long that they forget what they are waiting for"; thus a change of aims, a lowering of ideals will, as often as not, stand in place of realisation.

With George the failure was definite, clear-cut; the powers against which he arrayed himself immovable. For he was up against the English law, as full of strange twists, and yet as narrow and indivertible as the English mind. Having lost the inherited habit of faith in Cleaver, Brown and Son, he tried three well-known firms of lawyers in connection with his divorce; he also tried special men to whom he had been recommended; but not one would consent to take the case into court. He had no witnesses as to his wife's compromising position upon that fatal night; and even if he had it would be impossible to convict any woman upon that single count of embracing a male cousin, more particularly when the embrace might be taken as an emotional

farewell at an especially emotional time. Such farewells may be seen to take place between comparative strangers upon the departure of any troop train.

It was characteristic of George, his pride, his prudery, that—despite his intense desire for freedom—he could not bring himself to mention the fact that Peggy—his wife—was in her night-dress at the time. Had he done so it might have influenced the lawyers. As it was, the most they could suggest was that private detectives should be set to watch Mrs. D'Eath. Of course Captain French was in France, but it would be easy to ascertain when he returned on leave. "Anyhow," as one lawyer said—and this was the end of *him,* so far as George was concerned—"there is usually more than one possible co-respondent in such cases."

George had never cared very passionately for his wife; but, in the bottom of his heart, even now, he could not believe that she was actually unfaithful to him, even with one man—"Unfaithful enough," that was what he would have said, unfaithful in thought and word, in desire if not in deed—nor could he bring himself to the meanness of having her watched, questioning the servants.

It was little wonder that no one could be found to take up his case. At last in despair, dogged, sullen, his disappointment hidden under an added pomposity, he went back to Cleaver, Brown and Son. They had made such a mess of that other affair, he felt certain they would be only too glad of his renewed patronage—"If I'm willing to let bygones be bygones," he thought.

But neither old Brown—a milder edition of his son—nor Cleaver—iron grey, doubtful of everything save his own existence—could be persuaded to touch the case. They knew very well that the entire family objected to any idea of a divorce, and, after all, the conglomerated family meant more to them than George alone. Apart from this he could produce no evidence of any sort, and they did not care to mix themselves up with failures. They had acted for the D'Eaths for generations, but they would not act in this: they said so more plainly than any one of the other lawyers—because

they knew more, were more intimately involved, had more to lose.

From them George went to a man whom he knew to be dishonourable, of no class whatever, and came away from him sick with rage and shame; went straight back to Dene Royal and shut himself up there; would speak to no one, see no one, not even his uncles, the Reverend Horace and the Squire of Thorns; not even Mary, hitherto regarded as the inexhaustible box of ointment, the mild Pomade Devine for all family bruises.

Life had been brutally unfair to him; how could they know what he felt?—he thought savagely. *They* had never suffered as he suffered. It seemed incredible that, with his ideals of reserve, his hatred of scandal, he should yet be drawn into such a quagmire. He thought so much of himself, his own position, that it was as though he were the centre of a whirlpool. It appeared as if everything, even the European war, was part of a conspiracy against him. Why, if there was no war there would be no sort of sentiment hanging round the figure of Captain French.

At last he got to such a state that he could not bear to show his face, even on his own estate: the woman taken in adultery could not have felt a more intense shame.

As to Peggy, she was annoyed at the turn affairs had taken; her people were angry with her, tiresome about money; but she was not ashamed. What had she to be ashamed of?

"Poor little me, what have I done?" she would enquire of all the relations, friends, acquaintances into whose ears she poured her tale of woe. She was quite frank about it—far franker than poor George, the innocent one, had ever dared to be—"Why, I only just ran down in my nighty to say good-bye to poor old Teddy—well, who knows if he will ever come back alive? But doesn't that just show? If there was anything between us, would I have been likely to do a silly thing like that, with my husband coming and going all the time? It's too preposterous of George to sulk, make a mountain out of a mole-hill in this way. Anyhow,

my conscience is perfectly clear, thank goodness! And if you ask me, I believe George wants to get rid of me; has got someone else up his sleeve. Those quiet men are always the sly ones."

Of course George had been forced to make the rest of the family acquainted with Cleaver, Brown and Son's revelation regarding that three years clause, the way in which it affected them. He wrote to Charles—more aggressively than usual, because he felt himself in some measure to blame—and Charles wrote back remarking that he seemed to have made a pretty all-round ass of himself: adding this completely uncalled-for remark—"I think you are altogether out of it about your wife and French. He is here now. A dashed good fellow, with plenty of horse-sense."

There was an insult in this too. It was evident that Charles, who had always disliked his sister-in-law, looked on George as the only person in the least likely to be taken in by her somewhat pinchbeck charms.

Still it had been comparatively easy to write to Charles, tear up his reply, consigning it to the waste-paper basket. It was far less easy to interview the rest of the family; and it was not only the interviewing, it was the endless discussions regarding him and his own private affairs which bit to the bone: *his* turn now to find the conversation dropping to silence as he entered a room.

Every one of them had planned out his or her income, calculated it upon the basis of no death dues. Harold, who was supposed to be laying up treasures in Heaven, was the most put out of any of them; some ultra High Church society had got hold of him, and every penny, apart from what must be kept for daily needs, was mortgaged for the embellishment, in the way of vestments and communion plate, of certain churches.

There was a Father somebody—"It beats me what any man wants with more than two fathers, the heavenly and the earthly," said the rector, hating all such "Popery," as he called it—who was inclined to be very nasty about the business, declaring that Harold ought to have had more honesty

than to make promises he was unable to fulfil; that if he went about it in the proper way, even now, he might persuade his brother to make good the deficit, even force it upon him by legal means. He was a holy man, but his outlook was blurred by a love of money; apart from this he did not know the law, and he did not know George D'Eath. Still—though he knew it to be unsound—it was this suggestion, more than anything else, which kept Harold feebly nagging, hinting, with a feeling that if he were not a Christian and a D'Eath he could get his own way and the better of his brother.

But though Harold was the worst of any of them, with an incessant dribbling out of his grievances—like a leaky tap—the others were hard to bear. They were all sufficiently well off; but they had thought themselves better off, and here was the pinch.

"'Pon my soul, George, if only you had listened to me and left that damned deed alone things might have improved, as they must do once the war is over," cried the Squire of Thorns, stumping to and fro in a way that tore George's already lacerated nerves.

Vainly he tried to impress upon them that, if his father were dead, the death dues would still have to be met, even without the deed; that it was not the deed which had killed him, neither would the lack of it have kept him alive.

But one and all, in a solid phalanx, they set themselves to disregard this side of the question: respecting anything they did not choose to take into consideration they were blind, impotent, paralysed.

"Besides," as Mary said, repeated, insisted upon, "there's no knowing how long dear father might have lived if he had not taken that unfortunate journey to Nauheim. All alone, too, without even James to look after him."

It was useless for George to reiterate the fact that the visit to Nauheim had nothing whatever to do with the deed; he and Mary had been through all that again and again, and, like a piece of indiarubber, Mary bounced back to her original position.

That was not all, either. If their father had not been driven from his home, Susie would still be there. "The poor child was so worried about him when she was at home. If you ask me, I believe she's lost her memory, like people do in books."

With the patience of an embittered despair, George pointed out the fact that Susie wrote every week, though she gave no address.

"Well! doesn't that just show that she has lost her memory?" cried Mary in triumph, remaining entirely unconvinced when her brother pointed out the fact that Susie's letters were fully and correctly addressed: that it seemed strange she should know where to write to, and not know where she wrote from. When he added that the fact of the letters being always posted in different parts of London showed method in Susie's madness, Mary declared that she had not the faintest doubt poor darling Susie was wandering about, not knowing where to go, what to do—"Just pops the letters in everywhere. And only to think of the care I always took of her! Everyone used to say I was more like a mother than a sister, even when I was a mere child myself. Not that one ever gets any thanks for anything, or expects it either," she added, with a new air of moroseness.

Little wonder that, between his own troubles and the behaviour of the world in general, George D'Eath was reduced to a state bordering upon despair. But all this hectoring had one curious effect. It drove him, so far as he himself, his actual person, was concerned, into a state of mind much resembling that of a hermit; while for the family, as for the public at large, he ceased to care. He would not have minded if the details of his divorce had been in every paper in England so long as he was successful, though he could scarcely bear to be as much as seen by one of his own tenants or neighbours. The backbone of his family rectitude being broken, the idea of the name of D'Eath appearing in print held no terror for him. By degrees, indeed, it grew to seem a sort of way of slashing out, and this mood led him into taking what might—to any

other family—have seemed the most natural course; advertising in all the papers, even the *Daily Mail*—and here indeed was a smirching—to enquire if there was anyone who could give any news of Hugh Arthur Clinton D'Eath, who was feared to have died in Nauheim soon after the outbreak of the war.

And this was not all; he did more than this, did what they all regarded as the unpardonable thing, added Susie's—"a young girl's"—name to the advertisement, so that it read somewhat like the inscription on a tombstone—"and also of Susan Elizabeth D'Eath, supposedly in London, or the neighbourhood of London."

This done, he shut himself up in Dene Royal, refused to see anyone, even his own relations, grappled alone with the endless streams of replies, the bogus information with which his advertisement overwhelmed him.

After a while he gave up so much as opening the letters, sank into a deeper despair, devoid of hope. There had never been any man so misjudged, so maltreated by fate.

For all this he still held doggedly to the idea that his proper place was upon his own property, the centre of a system; though he seldom stirred out until after nightfall, when he would walk for miles, inspecting the hedges and gates and buildings, poking up the sleeping cattle and sheep; making known his desires, his criticisms, to Cherry next day in a series of little notes.

"My place is here." He repeated that to himself with the constancy of one determined to remain convinced of the truth of his own creed.

In addition to all this, from being jealous of his rights, he grew to envy those with no rights, no responsibilities. "If only I were free like other men of my age, there would be a way out of it—I could go to the war."

At first the idea was vague, part of those speculations which come to all of us—even the most unimaginative—regarding what would happen if we did the thing which we don't in the least intend to do.

But the thought grew to a desire: first to be free to go,

then actually to be gone. He could not have imagined any reason why he—George D'Eath—should think it necessary to reinstate himself either in his own mind or with the world in general, but this sub-conscious feeling must have been with him all through that time, or—slow-going and cautious as he was—he would not have been so grateful for, so ready to grasp at the chance when it came. Nor, pathetically enough, did the idea that he would not be missed if he did go—unless, as the children say, with "a good miss"—that his place could always be filled—was already filled, indeed, by all the people who were so intimate a part of the real working of the estate—seriously occur to him.

All through that winter, and far into the late spring, it seemed that, very slowly, George D'Eath was growing: growing to be more of a man, and yet in some ways shrinking to more of a child, than he had ever been. After a time, even, he was brought so low that he ceased to feel any resentment against his wife, who, when all was said and done, might not be much worse than other people.

It was late in May when among his correspondence—in that sort of envelope which, save for the handwriting upon it, would have condemned it unopened to the waste paper basket—George D'Eath found a letter from his father; and picking it up, turned it over and over, staring at it, afraid to open it, while a strange, excited medley of thought went careering through his brain.

Even when he did open it, read it first standing by the open window, then sat down to it, read it again and again, it was a long while before the true gist of it—the possible truth in the apparently mad discrepancy of its revelations—was borne in upon him. And with these, to George's eternal credit let it be spoke, no living soul save his father and himself was ever to become fully acquainted.

CHAPTER XXXV

WHEN we are out motoring and the gear is on a sudden altered, we know that it has nothing to do with us—actually, physically; and yet for a moment we have a feeling as though the same crank were turning, readjusting itself in the very centre of our being.

Somewhat after this fashion things were beginning to happen outside Hugh D'Eath, pinching him in the midriff.

First Mark Fulton appeared, with one leg, for he was still waiting to be fitted with an artificial limb.

Someone came to call Susie, poked a head inside the door, throwing forward a casual, "Wanted, miss."

D'Eath was in the room at the time, and he saw the way in which the girl sprang to attention; not as though she actually moved of her own volition, but as if something which had held her tightly to her chair—a little bent, with just leash enough for a languid movement of her hands over some sewing—were suddenly loosened, as though she were erect all in a moment: wonderfully, proudly erect, like some springy sapling which has been pegged to earth; and not only her body, but the very heart and soul of her. She wore a light blouse, and through the thin muslin D'Eath could see how her neck, breast and arms were flooded with crimson: it was as though life were being poured into her. And yet nothing had been said, apart from those two words: "Wanted, miss," while her father knew that she had received no letter from her lover for some days.

This was one of the occasions in which something seemed to reverse within D'Eath. Susie had gone out of the room without a word; and yet he knew that, from the very beginning, he had been unable to realise one fraction of what she felt, was capable of feeling.

After a while she brought Mark Fulton upstairs. D'Eath heard their slow progress, but he did not move to help them; anyhow he knew enough to understand the delight which the girl would feel in being of real use to her lover.

He had grown to know and love the river in its every mood during those ten months which had passed since he first settled in Wapping, and his first thought, when the boy entered the room, was how absolutely right it seemed that he should have come with a swift, rising tide, a fresh west wind, the slap of waves, the spread of canvas; there was something so intensely live and alert about him; not so flowing as Susie, quieter, pivoted as it were more surely upon its own base.

When Susie interrupted what was being said with those odd, broken sentences which showed her brain working even quicker than her tongue, he said: "A moment, dear," and calmly went on with what he was telling his future father-in-law, while Susie's demeanour upon such an occasion was an instructive example of the right way of taking things from the right person.

They wanted to be married at once—were not in the least daunted when D'Eath pointed out how very little they knew of each other.

"After all we know as much as we're ever likely to know until we're married," said Fulton. "Much more than most people know, or used to know, because everything gets jammed up into such a little space, a little time, nowadays. One's not in a funk of dying, but one is in a funk of not having lived. If one doesn't act pretty quickly one may never get the chance to act at all."

"Perhaps, but still there is—well, there used to be prudence, and things like that."

"Yes, but don't you see, sir," the boy's grey eyes were full and steady upon the older man: he spoke with diffidence, but this was owing to what he felt due to another person's point of view, not to any doubt of his own. "One can't, in these days, put off living until one's middle-aged, save up everything—the taking of risks, feelings, happiness—in the

way the last generation did. Though, after all," he added with a sudden burst of inspiration, "when one comes to think of it, it was not so much your generation as the intermediates—the generation of old young men and middle-aged brides. Nowadays it seems as though one's bound to sort of play young Lochinvar with life if one wants to get anything out of it."

"It isn't as though you would be left alone, darling, you know," broke in Susie, "we can all three live together, we can have a topping time. There's no reason why we shouldn't live here, if Doctor Treherne is really and truly going to France."

"Who said Treherne was going to France?" enquired D'Eath, with a sudden pang; someone was going to be hurt afresh with all this business, there was no doubt about that.

"He said so himself. He's said it before, but in a sort of 'some day' way. He means it now, we had a talk—the other evening." She glanced at her father rather anxiously, puzzled and a little sad in the midst of all her happiness: "So you see we might as well all go on living here, together, someone's got to keep the thing going." She glanced from one to the other for an endorsement of this suggestion. But Mark volunteered no remark upon the subject, and D'Eath found himself admiring him for not even pretending to fall in with such an arrangement.

"Besides," added Susie, as though she felt that now, at last, she had got hold of an unanswerable argument, "it will be ever so much cheaper all living together!"

"Well, yes; that was one thing I was going to speak about," said D'Eath. "I don't know how you young people are going to get on, but—well, it's like this, you see—the—the—"—he rose from his seat as he spoke, for it always seemed as if, with any embarrassment, with that odd half-stutter, came a feeling as though he must be on his feet—"the fact is, Fulton, I'm desperately—no, rather ridiculously, not desperately but absolutely ridiculously short of money. Only just for the time being. Things will right themselves, a little decision, a little—ur—r—r—"—he hesitated, glanc-

ing at his daughter—"Look here, Susie, hang it all, but there'll have to be some sort of an explanation. Do you know what's left out of this half-year's dividends—the little I kept for myself—down to next to nothing with the war and all? Not enough, oh dear no, not enough by a long chalk for your wedding frock."

"What's wrong with what she's got on, why shouldn't she be married in that?" enquired Fulton.

"Oh, no, not this—this rag! I don't know what's wrong with it"—Susie glanced down at the skimpy serge skirt —"whether it's shrunk or I've grown or what, but—oh, it's all very well for me, here, now. But for a married person, an about to be married person, it's out of the question."

"No, of course you'll want things, must have things, faldals"—it was characteristic of D'Eath that he was concerned about Susie's outfit, gave no serious thought to the position, the means, of the man whom she was about to marry. "I suppose," he glanced at her ruefully, deprecatingly, turned half sideways, fingering the tassel of the blind—"we'll have to tell him how we stand, eh, what? Tell him that—that we—well, that we've run away."

"Oh, that!" cried Susie, "I've told him that already, wrote and told him, when he was in hospital—so dull with nothing to amuse him."

"Oh, well then"—D'Eath was immensely relieved—"everything is clear and above board. You know how we stand. I have the very small income I kept for myself; it comes from foreign securities, no one bothers about it, wonders how it reaches me, what becomes of it. But with Susie—that's a different affair altogether. Of course she might put in her own claim upon her own account, but it would complicate matters, you know. I never realised before what a nuisance money could be—the very deuce, you know. I haven't much now, and somehow it seems to slip through my fingers."

"Well, sir, I don't think we need bother about that—there are so many more important things than money. And

if Susie doesn't mind waiting for her clothes until after we're married——"

"Oh, I don't mind that," Susie sitting by the window, one elbow on the sill, turned her head a little, staring down at the sparkling water. "I think I'd rather like to feel that I owe things to you. It's odd, but I wouldn't mind. Only somehow it doesn't seem quite fair, when there is my money. Of course, as father says, if I care to claim it, give myself up, say nothing about him——"

"Yes," said D'Eath slowly, "yes, you could do that." He stared at her miserably, suddenly all the sunshine seemed to have gone out of life. "It wouldn't seem much fun though —all alone, sort of pretending."

"But, darling, if you want to let them go on thinking you're still in Germany——"

"Of course I want to go on, of course, what do you think?" cried D'Eath, with all the decision of a person who is not quite certain of what he says. "Wouldn't you want to go on?" he added, almost defiantly, turning to Mark. "Don't you always want to go on?"

"That depends, sir."

"Depends upon what?"

"Oh, I don't know—I——"—the young man hesitated, flushing crimson—"of course I know nothing about it, I'm sure you're right."

"Yes, but finish what you were going to say." D'Eath had turned his eyes steadily upon young Fulton, spoke gravely, with what Lucelle Villiers described as his "completely grown up" air.

"It has nothing to do with me—it was cheek."

"It has got to do with you, and I want to know what you were going to say."

"Well, sir, that it depends—of course you know best—but it seems to me that it depends upon the sort of obligations which you had towards the people, the life, you've left behind you."

"He left nothing," broke in Susie, hotly. "Why, they didn't want him, they never appreciated him, cared twopence

for him. Even the tenants——" she paused a little frightened.

"I don't know. I do think the tenants were in a way fond of me," said D'Eath slowly; answering her, though all the same she had a sort of feeling that neither he nor her lover were altogether listening to, regarding what she said; were gravely weighing one another.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was late in the evening of Susie's wedding day when D'Eath—who had been too busy to do more than glance at the headings of the war news—had his attention drawn to George's advertisement, appearing for the first time in that morning's *Times*.

Life had been moving very quickly during the last few weeks. It seemed as though physically and mentally he had been a trifle behind-time. The phrase caught his fancy—"behind time." It had its advantages if one chose to take advantage of them, dawdle at the tail-end of things, willing to be caught up by that dark follower who has so little to do with actual years, makes his own time. But he was not yet ripe for this. He still wanted to catch up, was conscious of feeling hurried, breathless, almost harried: very busy and yet—more particularly in the first hour of waking—conscious of the dreadful old feeling that there was nothing very important for him to do: happy over Susie's happiness, intensely happy, thankful; and yet all the while conscious that other people's lives, other people's loves, were not quite enough, after all.

Mark Fulton came and went. If he were not actually at the pier end house it seemed that Susie was due to meet him somewhere, off in a whirl. When she herself was absent there were for ever parcels and boxes arriving, or her Wapping friends, women and children asking after her, bringing her strange gifts, the Chinamen in particular—jars of ginger, china cups, painted fans. It was wonderful how, in so short a time, she had impressed herself upon the people.

The more D'Eath saw of Mark Fulton the better he liked him. In some strange fashion the one leg, the crutch, emphasised the lad's vitality—as much of the mind as the body—

the strong steady pressure of that sort of growth which does not end with manhood, which one can, indeed, scarcely credit as ending with life. In much the same way as Mrs. Paulton-Pyke's fine body seemed to emphasise her uselessness, so Mark's infirmity emphasised the spirit which rises above mere physical disability.

Now he and Susie were off honeymooning in Cornwall and D'Eath was left alone. They had all agreed that the wedding should be as quiet as possible. As a matter of fact —in intention—it could not have well been quieter: and yet it seemed to have left everything in a state of disorganisation. The people would not be kept out of it. A wedding in East London is of far less importance than a funeral; but this was an exceptional wedding, and the pier end house overflowed with self-invited guests who had found some excuse just to "run in."

Now, while the evening was gathering to greyness, with a little chill wind, O'Hagan's wife was washing down the entrance hall, and O'Hagan himself, breaking through all rules, regaling certain boon companions in the bar of "The Town of Ramsgate."

Miss Villiers was in the dispensary trying to catch up with what, by rights, ought to have been finished before ten o'clock in the morning; mixing powders and draughts, tidying over the shelves, making out lists, writing fresh labels. In the ordinary course of events these things could have been left until the morrow, and the day which she had missed from her routine of work—devoted to Susie—picked up in fragments during the remainder of the week. This was what usually happened when there was any sudden rush of unexpected work, such as that occasioned by a specially fierce encounter between any two opposing factions. The amount of stitches required after a battle where bottles—grasped by the neck, with the bottom broken off into a series of jagged spikes—are the chief weapons being beyond belief.

At times like these the ordinary routine of a day was telescoped, as best might be, into the remainder of the week. Fortunately the women of Wapping were used to being kept

waiting: they waited in hospitals, in dispensaries, in police-courts, in crowded little shops, outside public houses, without complaint, often with a good deal of enjoyment, for to them door-steps and ante-rooms took the place of the clubs of the upper classes, the mothers' meetings and sewing classes of the pious.

After all, time was "as nothing accounted of"; one room was soon done, everything was bought ready cooked, ready made—fourth, fifth, sixth-hand; meals so constantly retarded as to become indistinguishably mingled; for was not a bit of fried fish and a hunk of bread in the hand as good any day as all that tiresome business of laying tables, with washing-up to follow? Even those who did sit down to their meals, just "pushed up," left their dirty crocks to the end of the week; and after all when there are two sides to a plate why use only one?

As to the children, they needed no playgrounds, they played anywhere—as naturally as an animal will lie down to sleep anywhere—and thus, to them, waiting meant nothing more than an additional opportunity for play.

It was the same with the male portion of the community. As always with people who depend upon tides, they could put in hours with their hands in their pockets leaning over low walls or against posts: smoking, spitting. There was, indeed, only one class of people ever in a hurry at Wapping—apart from the draymen who mostly came from elsewhere—and this was the criminal class—slithering quickly by, dog-trotting along, close against the wall. And even the criminals had long hours of squatting by the river steps waiting for what the tide might bring their way; dreaming over the clicks they had done, might yet do.

But on this particular day, late as it was growing, things had to be kept moving at the pier end house; for Treherne had left for the front nearly a week earlier and a new doctor, and his wife who had been a nurse—professional philanthropists both of them—were coming in next day.

Oh, yes, everything was at an end. D'Eath leaning over the river wall gave a little shiver: felt his skin grow rough

with an uncomfortable sense of change; of being, as it were, stripped. He was going into rooms in Bloomsbury, with the idea that he would still come down every day, do what he could to help, anyhow until the new man got the hang of things. But he had a feeling that he would not be wanted, even tolerated, for long. The couple who were coming struck him as being almost appallingly confident and capable: weighing, measuring humanity as they weighed and measured their draughts and powders. D'Eath had his doubts as to how the system would suit Wapping; but one thing was certain, it was mere condescending kindness which had forced them to the suggestion that he might continue to help in the work. He was so sure of what they had said to each other—"Kinder to let the old chap down gently," that he could almost have sworn to the actual words.

Presently 'Rene came out of the house where she had been helping to clean up, to turn out the upper rooms.

"Well, I'm off. I've done all as I can see ter do, but I'll be back in good time ter-morrer an' bring my fings, me aprons, me pawn-tickets an' dressin' case. Comin' an' goin', Gawd, wot a life, nuffin' the same two days together—an' allus me as is left, so ter speak."

She spoke truly, for only a couple of days earlier the wistful and unstable, the strangely seductive, "Kipper" had gone off and got married, was rejoicing in lines, respectability and the near prospect of an infant, tempered by an out-of-work husband who drank. As to 'Rene she was coming to live at the pier end house to help the doctor's wife in her work, though it was doubtful if the new arrangement would succeed, for the lady had already fallen out with O'Hagan and his spouse—who were leaving—being, as 'Rene put it, "so blamed tidy as she'd clean the b——y boko off yer face as soon as look at yer, more pertikler if it weren't altogether straight."

'Rene's dark eyes were wide and bright, she wrinkled her nose and sniffed, staring out at the river. A "lady help"—not for worlds would she have been called a servant—sounded well, but she was not sure if she would like it.

Already she had a feeling of being caged in. "Strewth," she declared, "I 'adn't not thought about a man until she said as 'ow she wouldn't 'ave none about the 'ouse, then I felt loike bein' a sorter female Solomon—not meanin' 'im as 'as the slop shop in Gravel Lane, but 'im in the Bible along wif 'is seven 'undred old dears, an' them there columbines.

"First one fing then another. And them as don't get married goes an' dies. It gives me the pip all this 'ere marryin', that it do. I was goin' in ter sacy ta-ta ter Miss Villiers. But there's a laedy just come in as is bleedin' somefing awful, along of another laedy abreakin' the winder o' the Lights an' Liver Shop wiff 'er 'ead. Not as that's a reason fur 'er ter go on shakin' it like them there spaniel dogs when they comes outer the water, muckin' up Miss Villiers' pinny an' all somefing shockin' : an' as ter languige, well, I've 'eard some in my time ! But there, there's people as never finks o' anyone but themselves—an' the bloke as owned the blinkin' winder squarking out as loud as any o' 'em. Ah well, I reckon I'd best be movin' on. 'Spose I'll be seein' yer ter-morrer, but Miss Villiers says as 'ow she's not comin' back no more. A pity, a fine piece like that, true gold all through, s'elp me bob ! Since it sorter comes ter this—marryin' or buryin'—yer money or yer life—I'd get a move on me if I was you, old dear." She half-turned, sidled towards him, winked, touched his side with her elbow —"Arsk me ter the weddin', that's all, an' never say as yours truly didn't give yer the straight tip."

It was a good hour later when Lucelle Villiers came out of the house, found D'Eath still leaning over the wall in the moonlight. "I think I've finished everything, left everything straight now." She hesitated a moment, peering at him through the shimmer of white light which grew clearer each moment—"Mr. D'Eath, did you see the advertisement in to-day's *Times*?" She spoke gently, almost diffidently.

"What advertisement?" D'Eath turned, bending a little forward, peering at her, wondering what she meant : something in the way the light was reflected up from off the river spread it in ripples over her face, showing her smiling or

frowning, it was difficult to say which. For 'Rene's words had left him oddly excited and afraid: conscious of how much he had been fearful of putting into words, even to himself.

"I think it must be for you—asking for news of you, and for Susie."

"Oh!" cried D'Eath—that confounded moonlight—more than ever he felt that he would have given anything to be able to read the expression upon Lucelle Villiers's face. "That!" He gave an odd little wriggle, like a child who is afraid it has been found out; "I say—that's funny, isn't it?" For a moment he hesitated, aware of the inanity of his words, his laugh: then, as his companion said nothing, he went on with a rush—"Just like the sort of thing one reads of in a book. It's odd, but one never thought of them as real—the people who advertise, who are advertised for, don't you know?" Again he came to a pause; but still Miss Villiers said nothing, standing silent with the paper in her hands.

"Well, I suppose I'd better see what they say." He held out one hand, took the paper. But he did not attempt to glance at it, though the moon was so bright he might well have made out the capitals of his own name—for that, or so it seemed, would only make things more real: the path which he knew that he ought, and persuaded himself that he ought not, to tread the more evident.

"I suppose you're wondering what it means, what it's all about?"

"It's got nothing to do with me; but I think I know pretty well all there is to be known. Susie told me something; and I've gathered a good deal more, met people who used to know you, spoke of you. One doesn't want to know things—but sometimes it seems one can't help it."

"Well, now, don't you think it's funny——?"

"No."

"Oh, well! that shows you don't really know, can't possibly realise. Look here, honestly I thought that I should please everybody by what I meant to do, you believe that,

don't you? When, well, when it didn't—didn't"—he hesitated, looking at her half entreatingly, half whimsically—"quite come off, it seemed better to let them go on thinking, well—thinking that—oh, that it had."

"Even to this," she pointed to the paper; "even to supposing you were dead?"

"It could not make any difference to them," declared D'Eath with the obstinacy of a man who knows himself to be in the wrong. "As far as they were concerned I was dead. They didn't want me—I dare say they were glad, I expect, I'm sure, they were glad." Once more he paused; then broke out again sharply, for his nerves, his conscience, were getting the better of him. "Well, well, what do you think?—out with it."

"I think—do you know, I think that if one wants to be decent oneself one must try and believe that other people are at least as decent. Even if we know things about them—meanness, want of heart, we must try and disregard it. Show as much courtesy to rents in their characters as we would to holes in their clothes, just look past them. And, after all, I believe there are certain things which one can pretty well *expect* into being—affection, kindness."

"Susie once said that they would 'expect' me into dying."

"You quote Susie, and yet you quite realise how crude she was in those days."

"But the life there—ye gods, the life! She was right enough there, she knew that. Besides, as they liked it and I hated it, why, in the name of fortune, shouldn't I leave them to it? Tell me that. Has Susie never told you what we used to laugh about, what we used to call them—the Processionals?"

Lucelle gave a little laugh. "Oh, I know, and it's funny. But, all the same, it's more than funny. It must have some sort of meaning, because it goes on and on, through everything—that endless circular movement of custom and belief, of nature itself—and one does not get at meanings by running away. It is not limited to the 'county,' or the country,

to one nation, or one world. It's common to the sun and the moon and the stars, and—oh, all sorts of ridiculous things—Mrs. Sen and her babies, and love and life. It's no use trying to get away from it, you get out of one circle and into another—you can't alter it, only use it for the best. Why, my dear, it's as plain here as anywhere! Here where you can call a 'lady friend' a something liar, traduce her manners, her morals, her birth, and yet mustn't call her a 'woman.' You'll never get away from the conventionalities, they're the little shadows of great things. I remember once, years ago, reading of the appalling scandal occasioned by the fact of one of the sultans divorcing some hundreds of his wives, determining to cleave to one only. And yet you talk of your county and its rigour."

For a moment or so there was silence, then D'Eath broke out again resentfully: "That's true enough, I know that, I've learnt that. But—well, for me. They didn't want me, and if I could get out——"

"You couldn't get out—altogether out—you know that. You've left all sorts of shreds and fibres of yourself behind. Besides, how do you know they didn't want you? I don't think"—her voice dropped—"I don't think you could live among people all those years without them feeling—some—some sort of affection for you. After all, they were poor people there as they are here: your people. If you found your son, your family, hard, is there not some sort of chance that they might have found them harder still—'chastising with scorpions'?"

"Then you would send me back to it? It was pretty lonely, Lucelle."

"I don't think that it would be so lonely now. Besides, they mayn't want you to stay, may insist on holding you to that wretched deed. But still, I do feel that you ought to give them another chance. After all"—the corners of her mouth twitched—"you may not be the only person arrived at the 'dust and ashes' stage. Anyhow, let them know that you are alive and well—the joke's become altogether too melodramatic for a man of taste. Even if you find it means

going back for good, you may understand them better, enter more into their lives——"

"Never! Never!" broke out D'Eath, with sudden passion. "Oh, never—never anywhere, here or there, I've learnt that too. One's only on the outside. They all have their own interests—their own families——"

"Well, you have your own family."

"Not really—only in the letter. Somehow, somehow or other, I've let them slip. I suppose I'm hopelessly weak, I've never held anything—really held it. Now if I had—if I had!—oh, the ghost of a chance of starting again——" His voice shook, he was trembling from head to foot, and, strangely enough, she trembled too. They were so close together, facing each other in the moonlight, that it seemed as though the very air between was warmed, moved. D'Eath put one hand out and touched her wrist, tentatively. He was biting in his under lip like a child, his eyes were wide. To Lucelle Villiers it seemed that in another moment they might do something wild—laugh, embrace with absolute abandonment—middle-aged people—she flicked herself with the thought, and caught back something of her accustomed nonchalance.

"Perhaps now, you may get them back."

"But I don't want them back, that's the hopeless part of it all. It's too late; we're miles apart. One must fetter one's children very, oh, very closely with love while they *are* children if one wants to keep anything of them later on—I've learnt that too. And something else—I—Lucelle——"

"Yes?"

"My dear, I'm frightfully old, and pretty much of a fool, and I've never been very certain of anything, but—oh, now I'm certain—certain—'frowning certain,' like Susie"—he tried to laugh, but the tears were in his eyes—"that if you could bring yourself to help me I could face anybody; could face"—he gave a half-truculent little movement, glancing at her sideways in his own odd way—"well, even face the family—my family."

CHAPTER XXXVII

GEORGE D'EATH was giving a luncheon party to which all the relations were invited.

In the old days this would have seemed the proper sort of luncheon party, almost inevitable. But by this time the feeling between the head of the family and the other members of it had arrived at such a state of tension that the invitation was hailed with amazement; apart from this was the general amazement that George should even think of giving any sort of a party: "cheeseparing," "unfortunate" George!

The three sisters were all at Suttons, for Vera's husband was out in France and she was expecting a baby. George had been disagreeable about that too, for of course there were all Peggy's baby clothes—Mary herself had put them away, knew exactly where they were. It seemed ridiculous that Vera should be forced to spend money upon such things. But, for all that, George would not allow her to have them; though, as Mary pointed out to him, he could not possibly need them, was never likely to have another child; while, supposing that neither Charles nor Harold married, Vera's infant would ultimately succeed to Dene Royal.

"Really, George, I don't know what's come to you," she added. "Anyone but you would think it so nice for the new little heir to have poor darling baby's things; and I'm sure if he's in heaven, as of course he is, and can know what becomes of them, he will be only too pleased, touched."

These arguments seemed so unanswerable to Mary, that she could scarcely believe the evidence of her senses when they failed to touch George, who had always been so reasonable, economical.

Charles was home on short leave, staying at Thorns with old Roger Colburn: everything which George did had once

been right, now Charles was the favourite. The two aunts were at the Rectory. Of course it was only a chance, but it almost seemed as though George must have collected them on purpose.

"Ten to one he's come across some sour claret, wants to poison the lot of us!" that's what Roger Colburn said: while Mary, who declared that she had been given a soiled napkin last time she lunched with her brother, went to see if it were possible for the same thing to happen again.

Indeed, they all accepted for some reason or other; Aunt Caroline because she felt that it was Christian to forgive and was ready with a suggestion that she and Gertie should come and keep house for their nephew. "That napkin affair, well, doesn't that show how everything is being let go, anyhow?" she declared to Mary, stealing her grievance.

"And James not properly dressed when I called there at three o'clock one afternoon! My dear, one really does not know what things may not come to in a house which is left entirely to men." This from Mrs. Colburn; rolled in fat like an advertisement for motor tyres.

All alike felt put out because the lunch was at two o'clock, when they were accustomed to have it at one-thirty; and they all took snacks in the middle of the morning, ostentatiously, because they felt certain that there would be nothing fit to eat.

They arrived in little groups, rather early; and were shown into the drawing-room, where George received them. Mary had declared that it broke her heart to go to Dene Royal in these days because there were never any flowers in the rooms; but on this particular day the hall and drawing-room were both full of flowers. "Really, George," said Mary, in her pleasant, chatty way, "it looks as though you were preparing to welcome a bride!"

An odd expression came into George's face as she said this. He was standing in his usual attitude in front of the fire, which showed more than it had been wont to do at such times. It seemed, indeed, as though he had shrunken in every way; he had always appeared to take up more room

than he actually did, now he appeared to take less: was almost one of those people who may be brushed aside.

He turned a little at Mary's words and began fingering the ornaments upon the mantelpiece. "Poor George, I suppose I shouldn't have said that. It's reminded him of *that woman,* just when he really does mean to be nice, friendly," thought Mary, with real concern.

The rest of the family were trying to make conversation, politely, as though they were strangers, only Aunt Caroline was walking round the room, running her finger over things, saying, "Really, my dear George, you do want a woman here to look after the housemaids."

Mary could have slapped her. If anyone was going to be mistress of the Dene Royal housemaids it was she; why, Peggy would be better than Aunt Caroline. "One can really do nothing with those old ones, they won't be put in the wrong!" she thought, with a spurt of petulant insight.

Then George turned round and told them why they were invited. "We can't have lunch until someone else—two, p-p-people—a-a-arrive. Barnett has gone to Cottingham, any minute now——" For once in his life he was like his father, hesitating with more of a stutter than a burr; his long, large face was white, his eyes unusually bright, almost excited. "If he goes queer, too, after poor dear Susie, I shall begin to be afraid that it's something in the family," thought Mary.

"Still, I—I—I think as we've a few minutes to spare, the train may be a little late, and perhaps I'd better prepare you, tell you that—that—I have brought you here to meet, to welcome—our father." The last words came sharply, with a burst of something like triumph.

"What! What! Hugh! but he's dea—passed away—in Nauheim!" shrieked Gertie St. John—so shrilly that her voice cracked on the "Nau."

"Father! Impossible! He—he—— What the devil ——?"

It seemed for a moment that they were all speaking at once. Then the reiterated words—"How, how, but how in

the world did he escape?" detached themselves from the incoherent clamour.

George flushed a little at this, but he made no attempt to evade the question. They had all risen in their excitement, and he glanced round at them gravely, almost solemnly. "It is felt that if the—the—means employed, the course taken, were known it might make it more difficult, more uncomfortable for the other English people who are, unfortunately, still—still in Germany. I have been particularly asked to impress upon you the fact that there must be no questions asked." Once more he had caught back his pompous manner, his solemn stare.

"But father is—we were told—what can Lord Kiddington's cousin have been thinking about? It really shows how you can't trust anyone who has anything to do with the Government—that it was father who, who"—it was Mary who spoke, swerved aside like her aunt from the dreaded word—"who had—had passed away; weeks and weeks ago."

"I am glad to say that we were all completely mistaken. It appears that it was another Englishman, about the same age as my father, who left England at much the same time as he—he—left here, in fact."

"Well, there!" cried Mary, "didn't I tell you I was sure there was some mistake? Now, just to think what would have happened if I had taken your advice and gone into mourning, Aunt Gertie. One thing is that the relations of that other poor fellow won't have to go through all this terrible uncertainty; dear father will at least be able to see them, tell them something of his last moments."

"The governor wrote to you?" put in Charles, rather aggressively. "I suppose he said how he was, whether he was better? You none of you seemed particularly concerned about that." He had moved forward as he spoke, stood facing his brother, with reddened face; puzzled, and yet unable to determine why he was puzzled. Of course civilians had escaped from Germany before this—but still!

"He said that he was very well, in fact from the tone of

his letter it struck me that he considered himself almost completely cured."

"There you have that wretched Northcliffe Press!"—began the Rector. "I always said that things weren't half as bad as——"

"And in spite of what he's been through," broke in Aunt Caroline. "Well, didn't I always say that all this heart business was nothing more than indigestion?"

"Really, I don't see that at all, Aunt Caroline," cried Mary, aggrieved. "Everyone knows what Nauheim will do for such cases. And only to think of the difficulty I had in persuading him, persuading you all, that it was the only thing."

"And now," went on George, "before father actually arrives there's another matter upon which I would like to speak to you. The question of the deed——"

"Isn't it really amazing," broke in Harold, "doesn't anything like this show how completely the ways of the Lord are, indeed, past finding out? All that dreadful talk of death-dues, and now there will be no death-dues after all. And yet I don't know. Really, the people I trusted most have not been very nice, not at all so nice as they might have been about it, particularly Father Probyn."

"My suggestion is that the deed should be destroyed, if you all agreed to it?" George glanced from one to the other as he spoke, his face working oddly as though something, it might have been human nature, were breaking ground within him. "I may have been the prime mover in the affair at the beginning, the very beginning, though I think you must confess that you were all as keen about it as I was, once the suggestion had been made. However, let that be as it may, I don't imagine that you, any of you, even my own family"—a bitterness, most melancholy in its acknowledgment of a house divided against itself, crept into George D'Eath's voice at this moment—"have any reason to be envious of the share of happiness which it has brought to me."

"Oh, happiness! Happiness is a will o' the wisp. What

have we ever done that we should expect to be happy?" sighed Mrs. St. John; well able to satisfy every desire of her well-corseted soul, regardless of others. "For myself I know——"

"Oh, tear the damned thing up and have done with it!" cried Roger Colburn, swinging round upon his staple leg, stumping to and fro.

"You are certain? I don't want to feel that I have given you anything to complain of—again." Once more George weighed them dully, a little contemptuously.

"For the Lord's sake, yes, put the confounded thing at the back of the fire." It was Charles who spoke, but still the elder brother hesitated, glancing round at them all in turn, waiting for the nod of assent. Aunt Caroline, who was the last in the circle, gave an odd jerk of her head—for her velvet bow had slipped sideways—then opened her mouth; a call to attention which had impressed itself upon her younger brothers and sisters, during those days when she reigned supreme at Dene Royal, so firmly that even Gertie St. John had hung silent on the words which might come.

But even before she "had time to speak," as she would have put it, George had turned aside, drawn a stiff roll of parchment from his pocket, was bending over the fire—which had struck them all as so strange upon a fine June day—and was thrusting it deep among the blazing logs.

"I protest," broke in Miss D'Eath, with a sweeping movement of both hands, as though she would spread herself, enlarge her boundaries, her massive chin thrust forward. "It's more than unseemly to settle everything in a flash as it were. Like this, after all——"

"Really, Aunt Caroline, I can't see why *you* should be the one to make a fuss," broke in Mary, her head high. "Anyhow, it's much too late now," her thin lips were folded, her long D'Eath face caught a look of triumph as she glanced at the blackening parchment, then turned towards the door.

"Well, I suppose I'd better go and see about the luncheon."

"But there's something more," broke in George: and

though it was too late to catch Mary there was something so significant in his tone that the rest of them came, as it were, "to point" in a moment. "Firstly, I must tell you that the news I have concerns not only my father, but Susie. It seems that Susie has got married."

"Susie! Susie! And you knew all this, and chose to keep us in the dark? In this dreadful state of uncertainty. And who's Susie picked up with I should like to know? Why, she's a mere child! It's not legal—it'ull have to be annulled. And why—why——?"

As the pelting shower of words slackened, Miss D'Eath's rolling voice detached itself; she picked up her knitting from a chair, stabbed it through with the needles.

"Of course I'm nobody, I no longer expect to be considered. But perhaps, in spite of this very unnecessary and —and it seems to me, most ridiculous atmosphere of mystery —and you mark my words, George, when there's once any mystery hanging round a young girl's name, she's done for, once and for all—I may be allowed to ask—now Mary's not here to prevent me—whether, when you spoke of expecting 'them,' you referred to my youngest niece and this—this creature, in addition to my brother?"

"Tut, tut—nonsense, nonsense! Have him here? If he dares to show his nose here I'll horsewhip him, damned if I don't. Susie, that chit! What's the world coming to I'd like to know?" broke in the Squire of Thorns, who had eloped with his wife—seventeen in the first year of the 'seventies, and with a waist just under eighteen inches in circumference—then, still muttering, he turned and resumed his stumpings, before he had time to realise from George's expression—as did the others, hanging agape—that even this was not the end.

"There was one place too many." Mary had appeared in the doorway, flushed, important, hung about with a spiritual jangle of keys. "Collins was always so stupid about counting; he hadn't a word to say when I pointed it out to him. I had to go through you all, and even then——"

"But are you sure, my dear Mary"—once again George's

expression, malicious, amused, gave him a faint resemblance to his father—"you haven't, by any chance, forgotten to count yourself?"

"Of course not, George"—there was a faint pucker in Mary's smooth forehead—"I went through it most carefully, but still——" Once more she ran it over, counting on her fingers. "Yes, that's it, I was sure I couldn't be mistaken: six at one side and seven at the other. The top for darling father——"

"With your stepmother facing him, my dear Mary—yes, seven a side."

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